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William Hazlitt as a Critic of Literature

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WILLIAM HAZLITT AS A CRITIC OF LITERATURE

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BY

PINCKNEY FREEMAN SMITH

A B. UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI, 1909

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THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

IN ENGLISH

IN

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

1911







UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

June 3 1911

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

Pinekey Freeman Smith

ENTITLED William Hazlitt as a Critic of  
Literature

BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF Master of Arts.

Stuart P. Sherman  
In Charge of Major Work

Stuart P. Sherman  
Head of Department

Recommendation concurred in:

Daniel R. Dodge.  
Edwin J. Fulton  
Jacob Zeitlin  
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E. C. Baldwin

} Committee  
on  
Final Examination







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I

THE FORMATION OF HAZLITT'S CRITICAL IDEAS

That general reaction among the peoples of Western Europe against an effete system of convention and artificial restraint, known in history as the Revolutionary Period and in literature as the Romantic Movement, was at flood-tide in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> It was an age "big with destiny" in the conviction of the enthusiasts of the time, and it remained for the nineteenth century in its social, political and literary developments to verify that conviction. It was a time when the Golden Age was again about to come to earth, when a rapture of unbounded enthusiasm and infinite hope was in the atmosphere, and when every young and ardent soul was intoxicated with the idea of a freedom which had long been a dream but at last was to be realized. The common feeling of the time was expressed by Wordsworth.

"Bliss was it at that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven! - Oh! times,  
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways  
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once  
The attraction of a country in romance! " <sup>2</sup>

.....

1. -- "There never was a generation more romantic in temper than that which stepped upon the stage at the close of the eighteenth century: a generation fed upon "Ossian" and Rousseau and "The Sorrows of Werther" and Percy's "Reliques" and Mrs. Radcliffe's romances."- H. A. Beers in "A. Hist. of Eng. Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century" N.Y.1899.- P. 423.
2. -- Taken from a passage in "The Friend" on the French Revolution. -See The Complete Works of S.T.Coleridge.In seven volumes.New York,1868. -II:205.





It was inevitable that a richer, fuller, and more varied content than any which had entered into English literature since the sixteenth century should have come into it during the next generation, and it is not surprising that a group of writers should have been born in England during the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century,<sup>1</sup> surpassing in variety and sublimity of genius any group since the Age of Elizabeth, and possessing the same emotional enthusiasm for ideals, the same love of nature, and the same deep and universal interest in everything pertaining to man and the world in which he lives that had once belonged to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. As a critic of literature, and, what was still worse for him, as a critic of politics, and among such contemporaries as Coleridge, Wordsworth, Scott, Byron, and Lamb,- writers with an appeal better adapted to meet popular approval, it is not remarkable that one member of this group, born in the dawn of the Golden Age, should never have received the attention and credit really due him. But there lived and wrote no truer representative of that age than William Hazlitt, who exhibited most of these qualities characteristic of English literature in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, who possessed in an over-abundant degree

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1, -- The following English authors were born in the period extending from 1770 to 1810: Wordsworth, Scott, Coleridge, Southy, Jane Austen, Lamb, Lanlor, Campbell, Hazlitt, Moore, Byron, Shelley, Carlyle, Hood, Macaulay, Newman, Lytton, Mill, Mrs. Browning, Darwin and Tennyson.- These are given in chronological order. It will be observed Hazlitt comes near the middle of the list; but he was born 1778, the year of Rousseau's death. - See Ryand's Chronological Outlines of Eng. Lit. London, 1910, Pp.163 - 173.





a revolutionary radicalism both in his intellectual and personal attitude toward men and affairs of life in general, and, who had, above all his contemporaries, perhaps, an impassioned sensitiveness of feeling for everything about which he thought or wrote.<sup>1</sup>

The gusto of his style and the gush of his diction in fact are almost as rare in English literature as his critical taste for the fine old things in literature itself is, in English criticism. But these qualities apparently only mark him the more clearly as a true representative of a generation which was not insular in spirit, but looked to France and elsewhere for its inspiration, and drew from many ages and from many lands.

Hazlitt, a son of the Revolution, like Rousseau the "father of the Revolution," went thru a very long period of development before he began to write. He had dabbled in metaphysics, in art, and in journalism before he became a critic of literature; but the formation of his critical ideas began early, and many things entered into their composition. To such a nature as his, first impressions were the most powerful and enduring. At the age of eight or nine, Hazlitt had left America when his family returned to England, and thirty years after he wrote, "The taste of barberries, which have hung out in the snow, during the severity of a North American winter, I have in my mouth still."<sup>2</sup> And when a man he said that .....

1.-- Mr. Paul Elmer More, editor of the Nation, says of Hazlitt, "He was quite as much as Byron or Wordsworth, a child of the Revolution, and his blood tingled with the new romanticism.- His was one of the purest, yet most characteristic, traits of the revolutionary spirit- gusto he himself would call it.- But a still stronger term than gusto is needed, I think, to describe the swift qualities of Hazlitt's mind; He is the writer, to a supreme degree, of passion."- Shelburne Essays. 2nd Series. 1907-Pp. 73-74.

2.-- Memoirs of William Hazlitt, with portions of his correspondence. 2 Vols. London, 1867.- See Vol. I: 6.



he never saw a kite in the air, but it seemed to pull at ~~the~~ his heart.<sup>1</sup> This same vividness of imagination to be seen on the sensual side of Hazlitt's nature, also had its intellectual counterpart. The first impress his mind received from books, from pictures, and from coming into personal contact with genius in the form of Coleridge and Wordsworth, were deep and lasting, forming the basis of his intellectual character and giving him the impetus for his literary career. Consequently in order to understand something of the mature Hazlitt as a critic of literature, it will be necessary to see how much his painting and art studies, his early acquaintance with such writers as Fielding, Richardson, and Boccaccio, and his personal relations with the two lake poets entered into the formation of his critical ideas. The influence of Rousseau and of the French Revolution upon his early life were so profound that they deserve to be treated separately.

Something of Hazlitt's early inclination toward painting is shown in a letter written when a mere boy to his elder brother, John, then a portrait painter in miniature in London. This letter shows an ambition to learn not only how to paint but to do other things, as well, for he wrote: "I shall like to know all the Latin and Greek I can. I want to learn how to measure the stars. I shall not I suppose paint the worse for knowing everything else."<sup>2</sup>

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1.-- Ibid. 1: 37.

2.-- Literary Remains of Wm. Hazlitt: London, 1836.-- This letter was written from Wern, (Hazlitt's early home in England), in March, 1788, when Hazlitt was only about ten years old.





At this time Hazlitt was already drawing eyes and noses, and it is not surprising that later he opposed the plans of his father who had destined him for the ministry.<sup>1</sup> He remained in the Unitarian college at Hackney only two years, and then spent his time in a leisurely way for two or three years longer, thinking and reading, he says,<sup>2</sup> and probably taking lessons in painting from his brother John. But in 1802, during the peace of Amiens, Hazlitt went to Paris to study and to copy the masters in the Louvre, and here he found what he had long been hoping to see- the great masterpieces. Here also he was to learn, to his sorrow, that he was not to be a great artist himself.<sup>3</sup>

One who looks upon pictures as did Hazlitt, is not often given the power to paint them, for what he saw provoked him to keenest thought and speculation, but not of the kind which concerns itself much with the technique and method of workmanship. He looked upon Shakespere. He was not so much concerned with what the artist had produced upon the canvas as he was concerned with the impression the artist made upon his own mind, "A fine gallery of pictures," he has said, "is a sort of illustration of Berkeley's Theory of Matter and Spirit. It is like a palace of thought- another universe, built of air, of shadows, of colours. Everything seems palpable to

1.-- William Hazlitt's father was a Unitarian minister, who was himself the author of some religious treatises. See, "Four Generations of Lit. Family"- W. C. Hazlitt. London, N. Y. 1897. (Vol. I: Ch. I., Pp. 1- 13.)

2.-- Memoirs. I: 82.

3.-- Haydon said that Hazlitt was too lazy to succeed in art. See "B. R. Haydon and his Friends. By George Paston. London, 1905. Pp. 54- 55.





feeling as to sight! - - 'The eye is made the fool of all the other senses, or else worth all the rest.' "1 This same peculiar method or manner of Hazlitt's mind in bringing things home to itself in some palpable form, is to be observed also in his literary studies. Of Shakespere he says: "His plays have been the force of things upon the mind. What he represents is brought home to the bosom as a part of our experiences. - Macbeth is like a record of a preternatural and tragical event." 2 But it is not only in Hazlitt's general attitude towards art that the budding critic may be seen; it is also necessary to observe his taste as it discovers itself in the Louvre and to see what kind of pictures appealed to him most and what he saw in them.

The revelation that came to Hazlitt at the Louvre was a revelation of the past. He was staggered with what he saw there, and the artists of whom he speaks most are the famous old ones.

"A mist passed away from my sight: the scales fell off," he writes concerning this first impression. "A new sense came upon me, a new heaven and a new earth stood before me. - - We had all heard of the names of Titian, Raphael, Guido, Domenichino, the Caracci- but to see them face to face, to be in the same room with their deathless productions was like breaking some mighty spell! From

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1.--

Collected works of Wm. Hazlitt, Edited by Waller and Glover.

London, 1902. - IX : 19.

2.--Ibid. I : 186.



that time I lived in a world of pictures."<sup>1</sup> He was attracted most by Raphael, Rubens and Titian, and the first pictures he thinks of copying are those of Titian, Raphael and Vanlyke.<sup>2</sup> In Rubens he sees the same power of allegory in art that Spenser possessed in poetry,<sup>3</sup> and in a psyche he finds something incomparable to anything "but that unique description in the Tróilus and Cressida of Chaucer."<sup>4</sup> These observations not only show his taste for the old school of painting, but also how closely his conceptions of art were related to those of literature.

Fidelity to nature was one thing that Hazlitt insisted upon in Art. He had lived in patience with "Polemberg's walls of amber, Mieris's groups of steel, Vanderwerf's ivory flesh,"<sup>5</sup> and he declared that "the test of the senses is severer than that of fancy, and an over-match even for the delusion of self-love."<sup>6</sup> He observed that in ~~is~~ Rembrandt "who brooded only over the medium <sup>which</sup> through we discern objects, leaving the objects themselves uninspired, unhallowed and untouched,"<sup>7</sup> "that the wrinkles were not hard lines, but like those in nature."<sup>8</sup> Like Ruskin<sup>9</sup> he thought the painter who modified or altered his God's plan in order to secure an effect

1.- Col. Wks. IX: 51.

2.- Lit. Remains. I: XLI - XLII.

3.- Col Wks. IX: 71.

4.- Col. Wks. IX : 74.

5.- Ibid. IX : 60.

6.- Ibid. VI : 7.

7.- Ibid. IX : 50.

8.- Ibid. VI : 9.

9.- See Mod. Painters. N. Y. Merrill & Baker. Pt. I -II. Vol. I. P. XXVII.





was much at fault," and he was directly opposed to Sir Joshua Reynolds's idea of securing the grand or great style in art<sup>1</sup> by putting the ideal form before the natural one.<sup>2</sup> In speaking of the fine picturesque effect in Raphael's Cartoon, the Death of Ananias, Hazlitt maintains that the artist did not think of how he might secure a picturesque effect, but, instead, of how Ananias would have naturally fallen to the position in which he is portrayed.<sup>3</sup> But Hazlitt could never have advocated a slavish copying of the details in nature any more than could Ruskin. He had too high a regard for the sublime for that, and he did not object to the most spiritual aspects of nature, provided natural forms were not taken liberties with. He declared with gusto that the ideals of the mystic artists, Cosway and Blake, "are like a stormy night; with the clouds driven rapidly across the blue sky and stars gleaming between."<sup>4</sup>

The one object in nature which Hazlitt liked best in art and tried to paint almost exclusively was the human face and form, but he insisted upon being true to nature here as elsewhere, and he wrote of Raphael's Transfiguration, which he had seen in the Louvre, "This is without exception the finest picture I ever saw, I mean the human part of it, because the figures of Christ, and the Angela, or whatever they are, that are flying to meet him in

1.-- See "The Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, London, 1852. 2 Vols- VI: 330-331.

2.-- Hazlitt said, speaking of the difficulty he had himself had in trying to paint a head true to nature, "I did not then, nor do I now, believe with Sir Joshua, that the perfection of art consists in giving general appearances without individual details. Otherwise, I had done my work the first day." See Col. Wks. VI:9.

3.-- - Col. Wks. IX: 45.

4.-- Col. Wks. - VII: 95.





the air, are to the last degree contemptible." Here he is again opposed to Reynolds and of the same opinion as Ruskin who held that nothing truly and genuinely spiritual in art could be represented as being out of harmony with and untrue to nature.<sup>1</sup>

Hazlitt's method or manner of painting was very much like his manner of writing. He did his best work in his first strokes. "After the first hour or two," he has written, "I generally made my pictures worse and worse, the more pains I took with them."<sup>2</sup>

Completeness of detail he could hardly hope for and his work was limited largely to sketching or rather impressionistic painting. His essays appear to have been written for most part, each at a sitting and without much revision. If they were too long drawn out they tended to become prolix and ineffective. The same inability to take pains which accounts for his garbled and over-worked quotations and his neglect and inaccuracy of detail in his literary criticism, was also evident in his work as a painter and as a critic of art. Like Wordsworth he relied upon memory rather than upon notes in making his observations, and, he held in contempt, just as Wordsworth did, any such method as that of Scott, who studied nature with a pad and pencil. "Nature does not permit an inventory to be made of her charms," said Wordsworth.<sup>3</sup>

1.-- See Ruskin's Modern Painters. Pt. I-II. Vol. I : Ph. XXVI-XXVIII.

2.-- Lit. Remains. I : XLVIII.

3.-- See "Wm. Wordsworth," by F. W. H. Myers. Men of Letters Series. London. McMillan Co., Pp. 144.



Hazlitt's attitude toward art was much the same. "We had rather make a mistake now and then," he said, "as to a numero, or the name of a room in which a picture is placed, than spoil our whole pleasure in looking at a fine collection, and consequently the pleasure of the reader in hearing what we thought of it."<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that Hazlitt gave up his ambition to become an artist soon after his return from France, some of the deepest feelings of his heart, which always remained particularly susceptible to the beauty and sublimity he saw in paintings, were associated about the Louvre, which to him was a sort of personification of art.<sup>2</sup> "Reader if thou hast not seen the Louvre," he exclaimed, "thou art damned! for thou hast not seen the choicest work of art."<sup>3</sup> Seventeen years after he had returned to England, he still sometimes dreamt of being back in the Louvre, and, finding the old pictures he loved gone or changed, would cry himself awake. Another passage showing Hazlitt's tender and enduring attachment to his early dream is found in his essay entitled "Advice to a Boy", where he speaks as an old man full of experience, "If I were to name one pursuit rather than another," he wrote, "I should wish you to be a good painter. \* \* I have failed in this myself, and should wish to see you to be able to do what I have not

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1.-- Collected Works. IX : 51.

2.-- He justified Napoleon's taking works of art from other countries to add to the collection in the Louvre, which Hazlitt called "a school and discipline of humanity." See "Life of Napoleon Bonaparte" by W. H. 6 Vols. Paris and Boston, 1896. Vol. II. Pp. 43-44.

3.-- Collected Works. VII : 438 - 439.





- to paint like Claude or Rembrandt or Guido or Vanlyke, if it were possible. <sup>1</sup>

On the whole it would be hard to say just how much Hazlitt<sup>owed</sup> to his acquaintance with art in his literary criticism, but some of his more direct influences may be seen in his many references to pictures and to his own work as a painter. He has a habit, probably in part an unconscious one, of alluding to the works of his favorite artists for illustrating something he found in his favorite<sup>d</sup> authors. Just how many of his critical ideas may have been in whole or in part derived from his study of art no one can say, but his profound and lasting impressions of the Louvre have testified to the fact that his entire esthetic nature was very much affected at a time when his critical ideas were yet in a formative state. He saw the Louvre at a time when everything for which his mind had an affinity still entered into and <sup>e</sup>became a part of him. Later in life this would have been impossible for him, for he changed very little in anything about which his mind had once come to a decision; and it was well for him that he not only saw the Louvre while still young, but that still earlier in life he had read books and had come into contact with Coleridge and Wordsworth.

There is a striking similarity between Hazlitt's introduction into the world of art and his introduction into the higher mysteries of poetry. Into one he entered in 1802 by means of the Louvre,

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1.-- Ibid. IX : 74.



into the other he had been already ushered by Coleridge and Wordsworth in 1798, four years before he went to Paris. He dates his literary birth from his sojourn with Coleridge and Wordsworth at Wether-Stoway in the spring of that year. "That my understanding \* \* did not remain dumb and brutish, or at length found a language to express itself, I owe to Coleridge,"<sup>1</sup> he said, and in another place he wrote, "I believe I may date my insight into the mysteries of poetry from the acquaintance with the authors of the Lyrical Ballads."<sup>2</sup> They were revolutionaries like himself, and he saw them in the beatifying light of the dawn of the Golden Age, then rising in France.

Before he met the Lake Poets he had possessed a literary friend in the Rev. Joseph Fawcett, who had similar tastes and read the same books that Hazlitt liked to read. Fawcett's influence must have been considerable, for Hazlitt says of him, "He was not exceptious. He gave a <sup>welcome</sup> cordial ~~xxx~~ to all works, provided they were the best of their kind. \* \* A heartier friend or honest critic I never coped withal."<sup>3</sup> With Fawcett he spent some of the pleasantest and most profitable days of his life.

The intimacy of feeling which existed at one time between Hazlitt and Charles Lamb was a period when Hazlitt's critical ideas were already pretty well formed. Their friendship was beneficial to both of them from a literary standpoint, no doubt, but probably Lamb benefited most, for he was more subject to change of opinion

1.-- Col. Wks. XII : 260.

2.-- Ibid. VII : 226.

3.-- Memoirs of Wm Hazlitt.- I : 76 -77.





that was the inflexible Hazlitt; indeed there is considerable reason to believe that Hazlitt's ideas of literature were not so much affected by Coleridge and Wordsworth as he himself seemed to think, for much of his reading was done before he ever saw either of them. There is no doubt, however, that they inspired him much. The very fact that he had met and talked with these two prophets of the time stirred him to his depths. He speaks of them in the rapt language of vision- just as he speaks of the Louvre. "The genius of ( Coleridge's) face as from a height surveyed and projected him ( with sufficient capacity and huge aspirations) into the world unknown of thought and imagination;"<sup>1</sup> and in the eye of Wordsworth there was "a fire \* \* \* ( as if he saw something in the objects more than the outward appearance)." <sup>2</sup> Hazlitt does not usually speak in this way unless he has been deeply moved.<sup>3</sup>

One thing that Coleridge encouraged Hazlitt to do was to finish his "Essay on the Principles of Human Action,"--a metaphysical work on which he prided himself the rest of his life, notwithstanding its very tedious prolixity.<sup>3</sup> This may be accounted for in part because he always held himself to be by nature more a metaphysician than a poet. The work was the result of Hazlitt's early readings in Hartley, Hume, Berkley and other such writers among the English philosophers. As a boy he had written an essay  
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1.- Memoirs. I : 43.

2.- Memoirs. I : 59.

3.- Mr. Paul Elmer More, editor of the Nation, says " In this portrait of Coleridge, \* \* \* we may see blended together that perception of physical traits, which was heightened no doubt by Hazlitt's training as a painter, and that power of seizing the psychological peculiarities of a man and using them to explain the character of his writing." *Shelburne Essays*, 2nd Series, 1907.- p. 80.



called "A project for a New Theory of Civil and Criminal Legislation," <sup>1</sup> and much of his time at college had been given to philosophical studies and essay writing. But Hazlitt's reading the philosophers, tho of much importance in shaping his ideas, was not broad and thorough in any way. Of the English philosophers he did not take up Hobbes till later in life, and his knowledge of French and German philosophy was very limited. <sup>2</sup> As for the ancients he said that he could make nothing of Plato during his youth, and about all he found congenial in Cicero were his two treatises on Friendship and Old Age, which he liked for their amiable gossiping." <sup>3</sup>

Neither was Hazlitt very widely read in general literature. "First and last, indeed," says W. E. Henley, "he was a man of few books and fewer authors. He read Shakespere, Burke, Cervantes, Rabelais, Milton, The Decameron, the Nouvelle Héloïse, the Confessions, and Richardson and Fielding and their kind." <sup>4</sup> Hazlitt himself bears witness of this taste for a few books when he says in his essay "On Reading Old Books," "There are twenty or thirty volumes that I have read over and over again, and those are the only ones that I have any desire ever to read at all." <sup>5</sup> But it was in these few books that Hazlitt found his touchstone in literary criticism; and, tho he does not go back to them in just the .....

1.- This was written at about fourteen. The circumstance that led to his writing this work, Hazlitt said, decided the fate of his future life. He had become an author.- See Memoirs of W. H. I : 25.

2.- Memoirs. I : 35: -

3.- Ibid. -.

4.- See Introduction to Col. Wks. I : IX.

5.- Col. Wks. VII : 220.





same way that Matthew Arnold turned to Homer and Dante when making a final analysis of any piece of poetry, he relies upon the taste he acquired in reading them in his mature appreciations of literature. His references to them are even more frequent than to his favorite pictures; and the first impression they made upon his mind grew stronger and more vivid as he grew older. He looks back upon his first books with a keen feeling of regret because he no longer experienced the same sensuous delight in reading. "Oh! never again," he exclaims, "shall I feel the enthusiastic delight with which I gazed at the figures and anticipated the story and adventures of Major Bath and Commodore Trunnion, of Trim and my Uncle Toby, of Don Quixote and Sancho and Dapple, of Cil Blas and Dame Lorenzo Sephora, of Laura and the fair Lucretia, etc!"<sup>1</sup>

In his youth Hazlitt had even read Chubb's Tracts with delight. "I often think I will get them again to wade through," he writes, "There is a high gusto of polemical divinity in them; and you fancy that you hear a club of shoemakers at Salisbury, debating a disreputable text."<sup>2</sup> It is significant that the divinity he found here was not of a poetic nature; one that debated "a disreputable text" suited his temper best. But it was not in theology any more than in philosophy that Hazlitt found his favorite books. The authors he liked best in his boyhood were Fielding, Richardson, Rousseau, Smollet and Boccaccio; for it is of these he speaks most often and with the greatest of relish, and later in life he says,  
 .....

1.- Col. Wks. VII : 223.

2.- Ibid. VII : 222.-



the sight of the old English authors in a stall would set "the puppets dallying." Of Tom Jones he says, "I think of the time when I was in my father's house, and my path ran down with butter and honey - when I was a little thoughtless child, and had no other wish or care but to do my daily task, and be happy! Tom Jones, I remember, was the first work that broke the spell.<sup>1</sup> \* \* I had hitherto read only in school-books, and a tiresome ecclesiastic history (with the exception of Mrs. Radcliff's Romance of the Forest)."<sup>1</sup> In Tom Jones, Tristram Shandy, and Joseph Andrews he found something of the same enchantment of romantic sensibility that he felt in reading the tales of Boccaccio which "dallied with the innocence of love, like the old times."<sup>2</sup> Of these tales he liked best the story of Frederigo- Alberigi, which affected him, he says, as if it had been his own case. "I saw his hawk upon her perch, in the clear, cold air, and how fat and fair a bird she was; as plain as ever I saw a picture of Titian's."<sup>3</sup> Of Joseph Andrews, Hazlitt says in a way of caution to any one who may have his own weakness for beauty in woman, \* \* "There is a picture of Fanny in it which he should not set his heart on, lest he should never meet with anything like it."<sup>4</sup> In mature life he wrote concerning his old feeling for Peregrine Pickle and Tom Jones, "Open either of them anywhere - at the Memoirs of Lady Vane, or the adventures of the masquerade with Lady Balleston, or the dispute

1.-- Col Wks. VII : 222.

2.-- Memoirs. I : 72- 73.

3.-- Ibid. I : 73.

4.- Col Wks. VII : 223.





between Thwackum and Square, or the escape of Molly Seagrim, or the incident of Sophia and her muff, or the edifying prolixity of her aunt's lecture - and there I find the same delightful, busy, bustling scene as ever, and feel myself the same as when I was first introduced into the midst of it." <sup>1</sup> Such a reminiscent remark, and there are many remarks such as this, shows very clearly that what Hazlitt got from his first reading was characteristic of life itself - the romantically colored life of his own imagination which was to enter into and become a part of a criticism that embodies the heroes and heroines of literature with flesh and blood, and, if not always giving "to airy nothings a local habitation and a name," generally in "a fine frenzy" of feeling bringing forth "the forms of things unknown" or not appreciated before.

Besides the books already named there were others read in early life. Among the most important of these were the works of the Periodical Essayists, of Mrs. Inchbald, and of Mrs. Radcliff and De Foe among the old English authors. Gil Blas, Don Quixote and the Arabian Nights, also, were works that he became acquainted with early. He was so transported out of himself with Mrs. Inchbald's "Simple Story" that he remembers having walked out of the room "to escape from one of the tenderest parts in order to return to it again with double relish." <sup>2</sup> His capacity for that sort of thing was remarkable. In Rousseau he found his deepest and most

.....  
1. - Col. Wks. VII : 222.

2. - Memoirs I : 73



delightful draughts of sentimentality, but there were other springs from which he drew. Goethe and Schiller he read at an age when "every word was a flower or pearl";<sup>1</sup> and he says of them, "How eagerly I slaked my thirst of German sentiment, as the hart that panteth for the water springs; how I bathed and reveled, and added my flood of tears to Goethe's Sorrow of Werther, and to Schiller's Robbers."<sup>2</sup> He liked the longest of Richardson's novels "best" and found "no part of them tedious."<sup>3</sup> Among the Periodical Essayists he liked the Spectator "extremely", he says, but the Tatler took his fancy most. For the others he did not care."<sup>4</sup> He had shed tears when he read Paul and Virginia while on the way to Nether Stowey in the spring of 1798. It is somewhat of a relief to know that in the Arabian Nights it was for the comic parts he cared most<sup>5</sup> but he apparently took Don Quixote very seriously. This hero of Cervantes, says Hazlitt, "always presents something more stately, more romantic, and at the same time more real to our imagination, than any other hero upon record. His lineaments, his accoutrements, his paste-board visor, are familiar to us, as the recollections of our early home." And he adds "We not only feel the greatest love and veneration for the knight himself, but a certain respect for all those connected with him- the curate, Master Nicolas the barber - Sancho and Dapple - and even for Rosinante's leanness and his errors!"<sup>6</sup>

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1.- Memoirs I : 73

2.- Col. Wks. VII : 226.

3.- Ibid. VII : 227.

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5.- Col. Wks. VII : 23.

6.- Ibid. X : 27.





This last remark is significant in that it shows something of the partiality of Hazlitt's nature. His literary appreciation was in early life what it always remained, of too whole-souled a nature to bother much with quibblers, and sometimes - because his sense of humor was not strong - to discriminate very clearly between what was really sublime and what was merely ridiculous.

As early as 1796 Hazlitt had met with extracts from Burke's Letter to a Noble Lord in The St. James Chronicle. From Burke, Hazlitt got a new idea of prose style which must have had some influence in shaping his own prose, for it too was a revelation to Hazlitt. At the first sight of Burke's article, he said to himself "This is ~~the~~ eloquence: this is a man pouring out his mind on paper." All other styles seemed to him, he said, "pedantic and impertinent. Dr. Johnson's was walking on stilts; and even that of Junius, who was a favorite at that time, - Shrunk into little antithetic points, and well-trimmed sentences." -- If there are greater prose-writers than Burke, they either lie out of my course of study, or are beyond my sphere of comprehension." <sup>1</sup> He did not care for Burke's doctrines, however, and was "proof against their contagion." But his high opinion of Burke as a writer remained to influence his judgment of other prose writers with whom he met later.

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I.- Col. Wks. VII : 228.



The Hazlitt has said that his eyes were not opened to the mysteries of poetry until he met Coleridge and Wordsworth, he had nevertheless read Spenser, Shakespeare, and other poets early in life. He admits that he had possessed a predilection for such writers as Goldsmith and Pope, but he declares that he had also always read Spenser with most delight, wandering about "with a sort of voluptuous indolence in his poetry." <sup>1</sup> Hazlitt has little to say of the poets in speaking of his early reading, little even of Shakespeare. But the seed must have been planted early that was to flower and come to fruition in "The Characters," though it may have lain long in the subconscious soil of Hazlitt's mind before appearing, as in his essay on Hamlet, when he says "This is that Hamlet the Dane, whom we read of in our youth, and whom we may be said almost to remember in our after years." <sup>2</sup>

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- 1.- Ibid. 227.- Hazlitt said that he liked Chaucer even better, <sup>than</sup> Spenser, but it is not likely that he had read either with much real appreciation until he was mature, as he has little to say of them in his reminiscences.
  - 2.- Col. Wks. I : 232.





## II.

### Rousseau and Hazlitt.

It is perhaps not of any particular significance that William Hazlitt was born in 1778, the year of Rousseau's death, and it has probably become too much a fad to trace Rousseau's influence upon the writers who succeeded him. Apparently the greatest temptation to over-emphasis comes from a too close attention to points of personal and individual resemblances rather than to the general impress which Rousseau's writings made upon the school of which he is the acknowledged founder. But if any just appreciation of the influence which Rousseau's writings were to have upon any writer of the Romantic School is to be attained, it is necessary to see how Rousseau's teachings are exemplified not only in the writings, but in the actual life of the disciple, and moreover to look into the character and predisposition of both master and disciple to find a common basis for the same kind of intellectual and emotional experience. Evidences of such a common basis of character are so clearly marked in Hazlitt and Rousseau that it may be wise to take up some of the most prominent of these before considering Hazlitt's direct and acknowledged debt to Rousseau's books in the formation of his ideas on politics, society, and literature.

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Something has already been said concerning Hazlitt's extreme sensibility, particularly in his youth. This is still more obvious in the character of Rousseau, and it is characteristic of his genius.<sup>1</sup> Hazlitt has himself borne witness to this fact. "The only quality which he possessed in an eminent degree, which alone raised him above ordinary men, and which gave to his writings and opinions an influence greater, perhaps, than has been exerted by any individual in modern times, was extreme sensibility, or an acute and even morbid feeling of all that related to his own impressions -- to the objects and events of his own life."<sup>2</sup> Almost the same may be said concerning Hazlitt's own sensitive and egotistic genius, and in both authors their extreme sensibility and emotionalism<sup>M</sup> amounted, at times, to a kind of affliction or nervous disease. After being under the care of physicians on one occasion, he says: " Il était clair que mes médecins, qui n'avoient rien compris à mon mal, me regardoient comme un malade imaginaire et me traiteroient sur ce pied, avec leur squine, leurs eau et leur petit-lait."<sup>3</sup> This was when Rousseau was still young. It is interesting to know that Hazlitt when a boy at college

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1. Lanson in his "Histoire de la Literature Française, (Paris, 1909.), P. 774, says: "Rousseau est un sensible. Au milieu de gens occupés à penser, il s'occupe à jouir et à souffrir. D'autres étaient arrivés par l'analyse à l'idée du sentiment: Rousseau, par son temperament, à la réalité du sentiment; ceux-là desservent; il vit; toute son oeuvre découle de là."

2. Col. Wks. I: 88.

3. Collection Complète des Oeuvres de J. J. Rousseau (Citoyen de Genève, Tome XIX) - Les Confessions - Livre VI, P. 119. Paris. MDCCLXXXII.





wrote home to his father concerning his relations with one his instructors, "With respect to my past behavior, I have often said, and I now assure you, that it did not proceed from any real disaffection, but merely from the nervous disorder to which, you well know, I was so much subject."<sup>1</sup> And his grandson speaks of Hazlitt having been a sufferer from some such malady all his life.<sup>2</sup> Rousseau's morbid emotionalism which caused him to be delighted when he was a young man in watching his tears fall into the water from where he sat weeping on a large stone by the water-side,<sup>3</sup> is paralleled in Hazlitt's shedding tears over his favorite characters in his early books, when he wept for sheer relief from his pent up feelings.

It is not remarkable that both Rousseau and Hazlitt, endowed with the same sensibility and predisposed to the same sentimentality, should have both been equally frank in speaking of themselves, and equally indiscreet, both in their lives and in their confessions. The story of the love-affairs of these men shows the same

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1. Literary Remains I:XXIX.

2. Memoirs of Wm. Hazlitt. By W.C. Hazlitt. P. VII. (London, 1867)

3. See Oeuvres, Complètes de J.J. Rousseau. Livre IV. In the Confessions. Tome I; P. 204. "Dans ce voyage de Vevai, je me livrais, en suivant ce beau rivage, à la plus douce mélancolie. Mon cœur s'élançoit avec ardens à mille félicités innocentes; combien de fois m'arrêtant pour plaisir à mon aise, assis sur une grosse pierre, je me suis amusé à voir tomber larmes dans l'eau."



quick susceptibility to the charms of women, the same awkwardness and timidity in their relations with them, and the same frankness and lack of discretion in telling of their adventures. Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris* belongs with the Confessions of Rousseau in its frankness, and was modelled after La Nouvelle Héloïse. The reason it is so much like Rousseau's own works is not because Hazlitt <sup>d</sup>amired them so much, but because Hazlitt was so much like Rousseau. They were endowed with the same courage, as well as with the same weakness.

"Mon coeur, transparent comme le cristal, n'a jamais su coucher durant une minute entière, un sentiment un peu vif qui s'y fut réfugié,"<sup>1</sup> he says in one place. And in another, "mon talent était de dire aux hommes des vérités utiles mais dures, avec assez d'énergie et de courage."<sup>2</sup> Hazlitt says of himself, "the thing, a lie, has never come near my soul. I know not what it is to fear to think or to say what I think."<sup>3</sup>

Such courage and such a frankness were needed to enable them to attack men and institutions, but it often led to rather disgusting self revelations, at least so far as their love affairs were concerned; and it is something of a relief to know that both Rousseau and Hazlitt retained a high romantic ideal of love, particularly after one has read the gross details of their adventures as told in the *Confessions* and *Liber Amoris*. "Il était écrit que je ne devais aimer

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1. Dr. Otto Schmidt's "Rousseau und Byron" Oppeln und Leipzig

P. 75. From *Confessions* IX.

2. Ditto. P. 75 (From *Confessions* XI).

3. Col. Wks. XI: 541.





d'amour qu'une fois en ma vie," said Rousseau,<sup>1</sup> and he was not speaking of Madame Warens, nor of his housekeeper. "I never fell in love but once", said Hazlitt, and he was not speaking then of Sarah Walker the rather vulgar and not always proper young woman in Liber Amoris, but of "a girl who wore her handkerchief pinned tight round her neck, with a fair face, gentle eyes, a soft smile, and coal auburn locks."<sup>2</sup>

The fact was that both Rousseau and Hazlitt lived so much in their own sensations and ideas that they preferred to cherish a dream of love rather than the actual experience. Both were equally passionate, however, and equally weak when it came to women or to anything which appealed to them. I think this may be accounted for in part by the whole-souled abandonment with which they gave themselves to anything that engaged their affections or interested them. Rousseau's battle cry "tout out rien", which was taken up by the enthusiasts of the Revolution, came from the heart of the man. He was so constituted that he could do nothing by halves, and he has said of himself, "Pour Jean-Jacques, incapables d'ame prévoyance un peu suivre, et tout entier a chaque sentiment qui l'agite, il ne connoit pas même pendant sa durée qu'il puisse jamais cesser d'en être affecté. Il ne pense à son intérêt, c'est-à-dire à l'avenir, que dans un calme absolu; mais il tombe alors dans un tel engourdissement,

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1. Schmidt's "R. and B." P. 48 (See Confessions VIII)

2. Col. Wks. IV: 103.

3. Rousseau said of himself: "Mes passions m'ont fait vivre, et mes passions m'ont tué. Quelles passions, dira-t-on? Des riens: les choses du monde les plus puériles, mais qui m'affectoient comme s'il fût agi de la possession d'Hélène ou du trône de l'univers. D'abord les femmes. Les besoins de l'amour me devoient au sein de la jouissance".



qu'autant vaudroit qu'il n'y pensât point du tout. En un mot, son âme est forte ou foible à l'excès, selon les rapports sous lesquels on l'envisage. Sa force n'est pas dans l'action, mais dans la résistance; toutes les puissances de l'univers ne feroient pas fléchir un instant les directions de sa volonté."<sup>1</sup> Compare this with what Hazlitt has to say of himself: "We hate anything by halves; and most of all, imagination and superstition piece-meal",<sup>2</sup> he said, speaking of his theories and of his convictions in regard to them, but it was an attitude characteristic of Hazlitt everywhere so far as his convictions and feelings were concerned. "Mental courage," says Hazlitt, "is the only courage I pretend to. I dare venture an opinion where few else would, particularly if I think it right. I have retracted few of my positions. Whether this arises from obstinacy or strength, or indifference to the opinions of others, I know not. In little else I have the spirit of martyrdom: but I would give up anything sooner than an abstract proposition."<sup>3</sup> This feeling of devotion to truth in the abstract characterized both men.

"It is the past that gives me most delight and most assurance of reality", wrote Hazlitt. "What to me constitutes the great charm of the confessions of Rousseau is their turning so much upon this feeling. He seems to gather up the past moments of his being like drops of honey-dew to distil a precious liquor from them".<sup>4</sup>

1. Oeuvres Complètes (Paris 1885) Vol. 9, P. 206.

2. Col. Wks. XI: 534.

3. Col. Wks. XI: 334.

4. Col. Wks. VI. 24.





This feeling for the past -- his own past -- is met with about as frequently in Hazlitt as in Rousseau, for both were sensitive egotists as has been already observed, delighting most<sup>LY</sup> in the luxuriousness of their own sensations. They idealized and retained every pleasing and striking impression of their youthful years. Hazlitt had brought the taste of barberries from America when a boy to retain all his life as a sort of sixth sense; Rousseau remembered many years after what he had had for dinner at certain times in his life, down to almost the last dish. And thirty years after he had made the discovery of a little flower while walking with Madame Warens, he happened to find another and at once exclaimed, "Voila de la pervanche; encore en fleur." It was the first of the kind he had seen since Madame Warens had shown it to him.<sup>2</sup>

These first impressions of Rousseau's were no more confined to his physical senses than were Hazlitt's, however, for both were from the first fond of books, Rousseau's father had encouraged him in novel reading when he was very young, and reading became a passion with him, just as it became with Hazlitt. He read omnivorously, lacking the wise guidance of such a father as was Hazlitt's. "Bon et mauvais", said Rousseau, tout passait, tout passait, je ne choisisais point; je lisais tout avec une égale avidité".<sup>3</sup> It was perhaps

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1. Schmidt. Rousseau and Byron. P. 19. (From the Confessions).

2. Oeuvres Complètes; Vol. XIX. (Paris) Les Confessions  
Vol. 1. P. 75.

3. Schmidt. Rousseau and Byron. B. 17. (From Confessions Bk. I)





owing largely to the nature of these early books that Rousseau sometimes speaks regretfully of his early reading, but it is certain that they must have at an early age given him a bent for literature,<sup>1</sup> though it was not until he went to Paris after reaching maturity that he came under the influence of Diderot, and under his tutelage began to read "la littérature bourgeoise des Anglais, et y trouvait réalisées ses propres aspirations littéraires".<sup>2</sup> During his second sojourn in Paris, Rousseau read Pope, Milton, the novels of Richardson, Robinson Crusoe, and other works of less importance, and was one of the first Frenchmen to read and appreciate these works.<sup>3</sup> He was particularly impressed by Richardson and his Nouvelle Héloïse owed much to Clarissa Harlowe.<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting to know that these English authors who influenced Rousseau so much were ones with whom Hazlitt was familiar with early in life, and that particularly in Richardson there was a striking similarity in taste. "I consider myself a thorough adept in Richardson", wrote Hazlitt. "I like the longest of his novels best, and think no part of them tedious". He was in love, it seems, with "the bright Clarissa, the divine Clementia, the beautiful Pamela."<sup>5</sup>

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1. "J'y pris un gout rare, et peut-etre unique a cet âge", wrote Rousseau of his early reading (*Oeuvres Complètes*. Confession I: 11.)

2. "Jean Jacques Rousseau et les Origines du Cosmopolitisme Littéraire (Paris, 1895) P. 135-136. for Diderot's influence, See P. 153 for quotation given above.

3. See J. Jacques Rousseau et les Origines; par J. Texte. P. 239.

4. Ibid. P. 234.

3. Col. Wks. VII: 226-227.



With such books as these of the "littérature bourgeoise des Anglais," where Rousseau had found something congenial to his own genius, Hazlitt found in youth a rich mine of imagery and adventure, from the rough ore of which he fashioned and polished more than one sparkling bit in his essays, and to which he was continually going in after life, as need arose, in his criticism of literature. It was a kind of bond of influence which brought his own mind more truly en rapport with Rousseau's writings. Such an influence as this, which went so far toward the formation of a taste in literature, drawing in each case from the same fountain can hardly be overestimated, perhaps, in showing the same inherent qualities of mind which enabled the one to wield so much influence over the other. There is something to be said here, however, that may tend to show something of the difference between Rousseau's genius and Hazlitt's, as well as their similarity. It is in the more apparent fusion with what was in himself -- an assimilation into his own being -- on the part of Rousseau, of all that he read. In this sense he was more of an egotist than Hazlitt and also more of a creative genius. Hazlitt is the critic who enveloped all he found in books with <sup>an</sup> aura of his own feeling, but he looked upon the characters and incidents that he found in Richardson, as detached and real things. At least everything he puts into his writings does not bear his own likeness to such an extent that the original source





is no longer recognizable. Hazlitt's egotistic individualism may have been ~~as~~ great in degree as Rousseau's, if that were possible, but it certainly did not agree altogether in kind, for Rousseau's was more that of the original, creative genius who transforms all that he touches into his own.<sup>1</sup> Hazlitt never gets away from his own feelings, perhaps, but he has more of the classical attitude toward nature and art. Rousseau had a passion for music; Hazlitt had a passion for painting. It may not be merely fanciful to trace an analogy between their expressions in literature and these arts. The musician deals with something so elusive in nature that no one can say definitely from whence he gets the impressions he reproduces. In painting the problem is not so difficult, and the interpretation<sup>at</sup> is less romantic in nature because it presents fewer possibilities of meaning.

Hazlitt read Rousseau in his youth and consequently was deeply and permanently in love with him. The New Heloise seemed to have been his favorite among Rousseau's writings, and his recollections of his early experiences with it are peculiarly tender, filling in the soft background of his memory with more than one romantic and sentimental scene. "I once sat on a sunny bank in a field, in which the

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1. Dr. Otto Schmidt says of Rousseau and Byron: ("Rousseau und Byron" P. 109-113) "Aus ihrem persönlichen Egoismus erwuchs ihr schriftstellerischer Egoismus, ihre Subjectivität." Hazlitt himself said that the three greatest egotists that he knew of, "that is, the three writers who felt their own being most powerfully and exclusively, are Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Benvenuto Cellini." Memoirs of W. H. -I:XII.



green blades of corn waved in the fitful northern breeze, and read the letters in the 'New Heloise' in which St. Preux describes the Pays de Vaud. I never felt what Shakspeare calls 'my glassy essence' so much as then."<sup>1</sup> And of the Confessions: "Of all the pictures, prints or drawings I ever saw, none ever gave me such satisfaction as the rude etchings at the top of Rousseau's 'Confessions'. I had got it in my head that the rude sketches of old fashioned houses, stonewalls, and stumps of trees, represented the scenes Annecy and Vevay, where he who relished all more sharply than others, and by his own intense aspirations after good, had nearly delivered mankind from the yoke of evil, first drew the breath of hope."<sup>2</sup> This shows something more than a knowledge of Rousseau the sentimentalist, but it was not as the father of <sup>the</sup> Revolution that Hazlitt knew Rousseau best in his youth. The Nouvelle Heloise and the Confessions were his favorite books then - particularly the Nouvelle Heloise." Many a dainty repast have I made of the New Eloise", he says. "The description of the kiss; the excursion on the water; the letter of St. Preux, recalling the time of their first loves; and the account of Julia's death; those I read over and over again with unspeakable delight and wonder!"<sup>3</sup> In the course of time Hazlitt lost some of his enthusiastic passion for the New Eloise, but he never tired of the Confessions. The scenes which Rousseau had made famous in these books, Hazlitt visited when he was in Switzerland. He saw Vevay, the scene of the New Eloise, which

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1. Memoirs. I:73-74

2. Memoirs of W. H. I:73-74

3. Coll. Wks. VII:224.





he thought less romantic than he had reason to expect from his early visions over the printed page. He saw the lakes famous in Rousseau's descriptions; and something of the spirit of the romance Rousseau had brought to him in early life is seen in the descriptions he gives of the scenes he had cherished so long; but there is a feeling behind his words that suggests Hazlitt's first view of them in his own imagination in youth was the more satisfactory. The reality could hardly equal the gorgeous richness of his own fancy.

Certain passages in Rousseau remained in Hazlitt's mind all his life. . He had once sobbed over these words of Julia in the *New Eloise*, "Trop heureuse d'acheter au prix de ma vie la droit de t'aimer toujours sans crime et de te le dire encore une fois, avant que je meurs!" Twenty years after he dreamt of reading this passage again.<sup>1</sup> Hazlitt had a remarkable memory for striking passages in books that he read, so it is not strange that he should remember the parts of Rousseau which he enjoyed most. But his opinion of Rousseau's style was not a very high one. Rousseau's "imagination was not that of the poet or the painter," said Hazlitt, and he calls a description of nature in the *New Eloise*, "a parcel of words, images and sentiments thrown together without meaning or coherence."<sup>2</sup> If Hazlitt's own trenchant and remarkably clear and brilliant style resembles anything in the writings of Rousseau, it is in the war cries of the

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1. Col. Wks. VII:24

2. Col. Wks. X:75.



revolution found in the Social Contract, or in the didactic epigrams of Emile, rather than in the tender and sentimental passages of the Nouvelle Heloise or the Confessions, which he liked so much because they were emotional and tender.

There are many allusions in Hazlitt's writings to the Rousseau of his youth, and some - tho not so many - to the Rousseau he became acquainted with in maturity. The first was the author of the Nouvelle Heloise - the father of Romanticism - the latter was Rousseau, the reformer and revolutionist. How much Hazlitt may have drawn directly from Rousseau's political writings is not easily determined, for Rousseau's ideas had been long in circulation when Hazlitt reached manhood, and they then bore the impress and modification of other thinkers who followed Rousseau. But what he thought of Rousseau in connection with the French Revolution may help to determine what he himself owed to Rousseau. His pen, said Hazlitt, was nearly as fatal to the French race "as the scythe of death." <sup>1</sup> He looked upon Rousseau as the preacher of liberation from tyranny, of the instigator, and inspirer of the revolt against kings and "Legitimacy" - a word which Hazlitt capitalizes as a figure symbolic of a fiend incarnate - the very devil of tyranny and oppression which he could not hate enough nor damn too often. "What is it that constitutes the glory of the sovereigns of the earth? To have millions of men, their slaves," <sup>2</sup> exclaimed Hazlitt. Rousseau had set forth in the Social Contract that the personal interest of kings demanded "first, that the people be

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1.Col. Wks. IX:161

2.Col. Wks. III:289.





weak, miserable, and never able to resist them."<sup>1</sup> Both looked upon kings as monsters and believed in the sovereignty of the people, and democracy of feeling often led them both to extravagant assertions and startling paradoxes.<sup>3</sup>

The greatest influence that Rousseau had upon Hazlitt was in the idea of the Revolution itself. What it meant to him can hardly be over-estimated. It was not so much the failure of the Revolution itself that drove Hazlitt to despair, as the failure of the revolutionists to make good the abstract idea behind it, the idea of Rousseau that governments belong to the governed and not to monsters on thrones who held their sovereignty by divine right of birth. "I set out in life with the French Revolution?" said Hazlitt. . "Youth was then doubly such. It was the dawn of a new era, a new impulse had been given to men's minds, and the sun of Liberty rose upon the sun of Life in the same day, and both were proud to run their race together. Little did I dream, while my first hopes and wishes went hand in hand with those of the human race, that long before my eyes should close, the dawn would be overcast, and set once more in the night of despotism - - 'total eclipse!' " <sup>2</sup> - - The 'total eclipse' came with Waterloo - an event which all but broke Hazlitt's heart, and it is said that he

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1. See Rousseau's Social Contract. Translated by Rose M. Harrington, N. Y. 1893. P. 110.

2. Col. Wks. XII:158.

3. Hazlitt said, "Tyrants are at all times mad with the lust of power" (Col. Wks. XI:557) Compare this with Rousseau's denunciations of kings in the Social Contract.



never tasted liquor after the final prolonged debauch he indulged in on hearing the news.<sup>1</sup> He idolized Napoleon as a great man and especially as the one able champion of the Revolutionary idea that was opposed to legitimacy. It is legitimacy that he calls the "true moral atheism, the equal blasphemy against God and man, the sin against the Holy Ghost, the lowest deep of debasement and despair to which there is no lower deep." And he adds, "He who saves me from this conclusion, who makes a mock of this doctrine, and sets at naught its power, is to me not less than the God of my idolatry. He who did this for me, and for the rest of the world, and who alone could do it, was Bonaparte."<sup>2</sup> This outburst of passion explains much in Hazlitt. Like Rousseau he was passionately devoted to a principle, and in this instance to the greatest teaching of Rousseau; that sovereignty belonged to the people and must come thru and from the will of the people - the great central teaching of the Social Contract and that which gave Rousseau the title, "Father of the Revolution."

The utterances of Hazlitt on this principle are singularly like those of Rousseau. "The will of the people," he says, necessarily tends to the general good as its end; and it must attain that end, and can only attain it, in proportion as it is guided -- First,

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1. See "B.R. Haydon and his Friends" By Geo. Paston. P. 63 - It is <sup>not</sup> to be believed how the destruction of Napoleon affected him. He seemed prostrated in mind and body; he walked about unwashed, unshaven, hardly sober by day, always intoxicated by night, literally for weeks until at length awaking as it were, from his stupor, he at once left off all stimulating liquors, and never touched them after."

2. Col. Wks. III:34.





by popular feeling, as arising out of the immediate wants and wishes of the great mass of the people, - Secondly, by public opinion, as arising out of the impartial reason and enlightened intellect of the community."<sup>1</sup> This is nothing more than a restatement of what Rousseau had already said in the Social Contract. It was this principle that Hazlitt saw embodied in Napoleon and which he saw go down into the dust at Waterloo. It was the defeat of this principle and not of the French that he deplored. He despised the French and the French character as unworthy of the cause they were engaged in. "If a nation of a species lower than men had undertaken a Revolution", says Hazlitt, "they would not have conducted it worse than this France, with more chattering, more malice, more unmeaning gesticulation, and less dignity and unity of purpose."<sup>2</sup> Neither Rousseau, the prophet of the Revolution, nor Napoleon, its strange evangelist and defender, was French, and Hazlitt was glad that they were not French; for at heart he was an Englishman of Englishmen. But like Rousseau he loved no man so much as he loved all mankind, and, particularly, as he loved all mankind in the hope of seeing abstract truth prevail among men. Like Rousseau he failed to keep on good terms with his friends because he cared more for the race of man in the abstract than for any

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1. Col. Wks. III:291.

2. Life of Napoleon Bonaparte. By Wm. Hazlitt. Vol. 2, P.1.



individual in it,<sup>1</sup> and like him was maligned and persecuted for his devotion to abstract principles in the face of present expediency and general conformity to particular facts and conditions. Their own exaggerated feeling of individuality seemed to relieve them in large part from the necessity of doing homage to individuals in the society of their contemporaries, and so they stood in a manner alone and independent.

Turning from politics to literature again, it may be well to look for a moment at Rousseau's influence upon Hazlitt in the field of literary criticism. Perhaps it is harder to see here just what that influence may have been than anywhere else. For it was here that Hazlitt in a large measure -- perhaps in the largest -- differed from most of his contemporaries of the Romantic school -- the school which Rousseau had founded; but it remains to be seen if his departure from the extreme romanticism of his time was not rather an advance in the general movement started by Rousseau than a falling away from it, particularly in its cosmopolitanism. Rousseau does not

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1. Rousseau said, "Je les aime tous, et...c'est, parce que je les aime, que je hais l'injustice, ...cet interet pour l'espece suffit pour nourrir mon coeur, je n'ai pas besoin d'amis particuliers." (Let. a Malesherbes.) Schmidt's "R. und B." 115. Hazlitt said, "If I have sacrificed my friends, it has always been to a theory." See Alex. Ireland's "William Hazlitt." 1889. P. LII.





scorn to go back to something for models and authority -- his Social Contract is full of references to Rome, and his Emile harks back to Plato. Hazlitt found his classical antiquity in the Middle ages with Boccaccio and in the Renaissance with Cervantes and Shakespear, rather than in Greek or Latin literature; tho he used the latter whenever his limited knowledge permitted. So the analogy still holds. Unlike Rousseau his genius was not of the creative kind, however, and his results and methods are consequently not quite the same. In a measure it must be admitted that on one side Hazlitt was a decided reactionary against the extravagances of Rousseau's disciples, but Rousseau was himself capable of reacting against some of his own extravagances at times, and it may be doubted seriously if he would have looked upon Shelley and Byron with much more patience than did Hazlitt provided he had been set to criticise them. And if it be true, as Joseph Texte says in his "Jean Jacques Rousseau et les Origines de la Cosmopolitisme", that "Le triomphe du cosmopolitisme," and "la littérature du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle commence à lui,"<sup>1</sup> then Hazlitt may be reckoned as a true disciple of Rousseau, altho an independent and perhaps unorthodox one at some points. For Hazlitt recognized the beginning of a new era in literature with the Revolution, and he partook most extensively in its broader outlook and cosmopolitan point of view.<sup>2</sup>

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1. See Texte. Pp. 453-455.

2. The historical sense was much stronger in Carlyle than it was in Hazlitt, and is more clearly to be seen in Carlyle's critical writing than in Hazlitt's. But both Hazlitt and Carlyle lived in a period when the modern historical method of criticism was only beginning. It is enough to know that Hazlitt recognized its possibilities.



If he relies more upon the suffrage of the ages in establishing the worth of a piece of literature, a kind of democracy which Burke taught more consistently than did Rousseau, he also recognizes perhaps as much as any of his contemporaries that literature is largely national in character and is to be judged not by absolute standards, but from a historical point of view which considers "times and circumstances."<sup>1</sup> When he says that "all truly great works of art are national in their character and origin,"<sup>2</sup> he agrees with what Rousseau had already expounded. In fact there is much in Hazlitt that is akin to what Texte finds in Rousseau when he says: "Le role de Rousseau dans la critique est précisément d'avoir substitué, à l'idée d'un gout absolu-parfaitement réalisée -- dans quelques oeuvres de genie, la notion d'un gout relatif, variable suivant les epoques et les pays. Le gout, dit il-~~il~~ expressément, n'est que la faculté de juger ce qui plait ou déplait au plus grand nombre."<sup>3</sup> There is in this not only the germ of Hazlitt's principle of nationality in literature, but also of his faith in the suffrage of the ages and of the people in determining the value of literature; and if he protests at all against Rousseau's cosmopolitanism it is on the score of its not being broad and cosmopolitan enough, at least so far as literature is concerned. He voices in many places in his criticism of his contemporaries what he very

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1. Col. Wks. XI:464

2. Col. Wks. XI:543

3. (J. J. Rousseau et les Origines de le Cosmopolitisme P. 333.) Compare the latter part of the quotation above, from Rousseau, with these words of Hazlitt concerning the reliability of national taste in establishing the worth of a writer: "We may be sure of this", said





clearly expressed in the following words: "If we have pretty well got rid of the narrow bigotry that would limit all sense or virtue to our own country, and have fraternized, like true cosmopolites, with our neighbors and contemporaries, we have made our self-love amends by letting the generations we live in engross nearly all our admiration." <sup>1</sup> If this criticism ever amounted to heresy against Rousseau, it was in departing from the letter rather than from the spirit of of the master, for it was almost as utterly impossible for Hazlitt to be the literal expounder of any established system or philosophy, as it was for Rousseau to adhere strictly to any authority or even to be consistent, so far as his life and actions were concerned, in following his own system and precedent.

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Hazlitt, "that when we see nothing but grossness and barbarism, or insipidity and verbiage in a writer that is the God of a nation's idolatry, it is we and not they who want true taste and feeling." Col. Wks. VI:223.

1. Col. Wks. V: 176-177.



### III.

#### Hazlitt and the Age of Elizabeth.

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William Hazlitt wrote only four works which were devoted exclusively to literary criticism. Of these, two are studies of Elizabethan literature, and the others are in large part concerned with the period in which dramatic poetry was at its greatest.<sup>1</sup> It was not merely because he was fond of the play - and his regular contributions to the dramatic columns of the journals of his day prove him to have been fond of it - but it was also because he found his most congenial atmosphere in the imaginative literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that he preferred to give his best thought and finest sensibility of taste to the interpretation of the spirit of that literature. It was the age that appealed most to the poetical and metaphysical Hazlitt. The novelists of the eighteenth century were most dear to a sentimental realism of his nature - which was strong in him, and the contemporary literature of his own age, shot thru as it was with the issues that touched Hazlitt most vitally, gave motive and occasion for what is perhaps his most characteristic, and in some respects his most significant

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1.- "The Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth," and "The Characters of Shakespere" are both concerned with this period, but "The Lectures on the English Poets" and "The Lectures on the Comic Writers" are of course only in part devoted to Elizabethan literature." The Lectures on Comic Writers" is really more concerned with the English Novelists and with the Comedy writers of the Restoration than with the Elizabethans.





work - The Spirit of the Age. But it was the poetry of Shakespere and his contemporaries that moved him to his purest utterances on literature proper, and filled his soul with the finest strains of a poetic feeling least adulterated with the bitterness of political prejudice and personal antipathy. It was here that he felt that he had the suffrage of more than a century of criticism and popular approval with him, and he spoke with the greatest confidence and the fullest ease. English literature was the only literature that Hazlitt knew in any thorough-going sense, and it was principally from the English authors that he built up his vast inner life of thought and feeling. Consequently it was only natural for him, living so much as he did in his own past experiences, to turn to a past which to him was the period of the finest growth and noblest fulfillment of national genius in English literature, and so far as he knew in any literature. It was in the youth of ~~the~~ England too, - of the modern England that he knew so well and felt so strongly; and always Hazlitt looked backward for the greatest and most perfect creative expression.<sup>1)</sup> Therefore, it is not too much to expect to find Hazlitt's criticism of literature at its best and purest, so far as literary values are concerned, apart from the writers themselves ( if it were possible to get entirely away from the writers in anything that Hazlitt wrote), in his appreciation of the literature of the age of Elizabeth; for it will be necessary to look upon the poetical and metaphysical Hazlitt dealing with Shakespere,

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- 1.- The greatest poets and the greatest artists, said Hazlitt, "all lived near the beginning of their arts - perfected and all but created them." - But science he maintained, never attains "its utmost limits of perfection", while art arrives "at it almost at once." The four greatest names in English poetry are almost the four first we come to - Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespere and Milton". - Col. Wks. V : 46.



Johnson, Spenser, Milton and others of that "giant race before the flood", in order to understand the Hazlitt of strong English "common sense" and realistic sentiment who loved Richardson and Fielding. Without knowing Hazlitt in both these aspects it will not be easy perhaps to understand the more complete and militant critic of The Spirit of the Age who was at the same time the wonder and scorn, the admiration and despair of his contemporaries.

In setting out it will be wise to see what Hazlitt himself means by the age of Elizabeth. In his "Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth" he treats the whole period extending from the Reformation to the middle of the reign of Charles the First as one and the same. This of course includes Milton and the later dramatists down to the closing of the theatres. Hazlitt looked upon this period as one perhaps more distinguished than any other in English history by its number of great men,- "statesmen, warriors, divines, scholars, poets and philosophers." In this age he found what he had most relish for,- the purest English genius; that which he loved in another form in Richardson and that which he deprecated the lack of in the Germanized romanticism of his contemporaries.

"Perhaps the genius of Great Britain never shone out fuller or brighter, or looked more like itself, than at this period," wrote Hazlitt. "Our writers and great men had something in them that savoured of the soil from which they grew, they were not French,  
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they were not Dutch, or German, or Greek, or Latin; they were truly English. They did not look out for themselves to see what they should be; they sought for the truth and nature, and found it in themselves." <sup>1</sup> Because the literature of this period was old, because it was the most national in genius, and more prolific in dramatic excellence than any other period, Hazlitt was fond of it. Especially was he fond of it because it was both poetic and dramatic, and quite naturally he is most interested in its greatest dramatist and poet. But Hazlitt was too sane and too independent as a critic to permit <sup>d</sup>even such a figure as that of Shakespere to cast the other writers of genius of that period quite in the shade. "He indeed overlooks and commands the admiration of posterity," said Hazlitt, "but he does it from the tableland of the age in which he lived. He towered above his fellows, 'In shape and gesture proudly eminent;' but he was one of a race of giants, the tallest, the strongest, the most graceful, and most beautiful of them; but it was a common and a noble brood." <sup>2</sup>

Hazlitt's genius in criticism was not of the historical order. He could not describe a mob as could Carlyle, neither could he trace from its sources and exemplify in its broader expansions general movements as well as could Carlyle. He lacked the historical sense of the latter, and he remained in criticism much what he had been as an artist - a portrait painter, one who succeeded best with single subjects. Besides, his psychology was not that of the mass or .....

1.- Col. Wks. V : 175.

2.- Ibid. V : 180.



of the mob, but rather of the individual and the personal. This was true in literature as elsewhere, but it must be remembered that historical criticism as it is now known, was not out of its swaddling clothes at the time of Hazlitt - in fact was hardly yet in them. Nevertheless in his general view of the subject, introductory to the "Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth", he has given us a clear and comprehensive explanation of the causes which produced this remarkable age. He sees the ~~chief~~ sources that made it great in the Ren~~x~~aissance and the Reformation. "We may seek for the chief of them" he says, "in religion, in politics, in the circumstances of the time, the recent diffusion of letters, in local situation, in the character of the men who adorned that period, and availed themselves so nobly of the advantages placed within their reach."<sup>1</sup> It is to his credit that he has proclaimed what historians of the twentieth century are beginning to realize again after all the cant of the past half century on the supreme importance of environment and circumstance in shaping human institutions and arts - the belief that the causes were also "in the character of the men". It is interesting to note, however, that he had a very keen insight into the psychological workings of the human mind in its connections with its environment, as is shown by what he has to say concerning the more obvious risk and danger, life at that time

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1.- See Col. Wks. V : 181.- It is interesting to note what Wm. Hazlitt thought of the Elizabethans in comparison with his contemporaries. "Among poets they have to boast such names, for instance, as Shakespeare, Spenser, Beaumont, and Fletcher, Marlowe, Webster, Decker, Selden, Bacon, Jeremy Taylor, Hampden, Sidney; and for a witness to their zeal and piety, they have Fox's Book of Martyrs, instead of which we have Mr. Southey's Book of the Church, and a whole host of renegades"- Col. Wks. VII : 321.





possessed, and which its literature reflected. "Man's life was (as it appears to me)" wrote Hazlitt, "more full of traps and pitfalls, of hair-breadths of accidents by floods and field; more way-laid by sudden and startling evils; it trod on the brink of hope and fear; stumbled upon fate unawares; while the imagination, close behind it, caught at and clung to the shape of danger, or 'snatched a wild and fearful joy' from its escape. The incidents of nature were less provided against; the excess of the passions and of lawless power were less regulated, and produced more strange and desperate catastrophes."<sup>1</sup>

Such a psychological background - on the very edge of the perilous and unknown - could hardly have been better described in as many words by a writer who wished to give a proper and telling explanation of the "high romantic tone" which Hazlitt found in the literature of the time. As a true artist, who would not be too literal, he has given us a glimpse into the abyss of the real life of the age to explain and exemplify the impassioned expression on the face of all its literature-a time when the human mind was most alive to its unique possibilities for action and thought, and was vividly aware in its own independence of spirit, of the immediate presence of death and the tragedy of life. It was such things that the writer felt in his own experience and brought out in his characters, that interested Hazlitt. The psychology of the personal mind and the metaphysics of the individual soul, Hazlitt was interested in most; and he found ready material in the characters of Shakespere

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1.- Col.Wks. V : 189.



and the dramatists of Shakespere's school. Here he is dealing with the characters in literature just as he a little later deals with the writers of literature themselves in the Spirit of the Age; and nowhere does he come nearer realizing his own ideals of genuine criticism,- in reflecting the colours, the light and shade, the soul and body of the work"<sup>1</sup>, than when he is dealing directly with human nature, where he sees the spirit of literature working in the concrete and personal. If Hazlitt had ever achieved anything of note with his painter's brush it would have been in depicting human character as seen in the human countenance, and , if he has done anything of much consequence as a critic of literature, it has been as an interpreter of the workings of the human soul in the characters and in the persons of authors and in their creations of characters and persons. Hence Hazlitt's love for the drama. "Our idolatry of Shakespere," says Hazlitt, "(not to say our admiration) ceases with his plays. In his other productions, he was a mere author, though not a common author. It was only by representing others, that he <sup>be</sup>came himself."<sup>2</sup>

It must not be supposed that Hazlitt has no appreciation for the non-dramatic literature of the age of Elizabeth because the title of his work on that period is what it is. In a sense the title "Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth" is almost misleading, but it is very significant in that it shows not only what Hazlitt considers of most importance in that age, but also as showing what this attitude will be toward what he does not consider of the most

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1.- Col. Wks.VI : 217.

2.- Col. Wks. I : 357.





importance. What he has to say of the prose writers, Bacon, Sidney, Brown and Taylor may show something of this attitude, tho it is still more clearly seen in his remarks on the non-dramatic poetry of the time. His characterization of the prose writers is typical of Hazlitt's method of dealing with authors, however; and his criticism of them, while rather slight than comprehensive in scope, and not pretending to take up any of their works in any thorough-going way, nevertheless, shows very admirably his ability to strike off a speaking likeness of an author in a few words; and at the same time it shows perhaps one of his worst faults or rather limitations, his inability to bring out and exemplify the qualities of an author with whom he has little innate sympathy of feeling. What he has to say of Bacon and Browne will furnish instances of both these characteristics of Hazlitt's criticism.

In Bacon, Hazlitt sees "the master of the comparative anatomy of the mind of man, of the balance of power among the different faculties."<sup>1</sup> To Hazlitt he represents philosophical acuteness of mind which saw rather by intuition into the relations of thought than by a regular process of analysis, and who was full of practical sense. It was of the latter Hazlitt is thinking, it seems, when he says, "The word wisdom characterizes him more than any other. It was not that he did so much himself to advance the knowledge of man or nature, as that he saw what others had done to advance it, and what was still wanting to its full accomplishment."<sup>2</sup> He liked the "Advancement of Learning" best, and after that the Essays. That he does

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1.- Col. Wks. V : 327.

2.- Ibid. V : 326.



Bacon full justice so far as characterization goes can hardly be questioned, particularly is he filled with admiration at the acuteness of Bacon in separating the grains of truth from the chaff of error. His characterization of Browne is not so happy nor so just, tho undoubtedly it throws one prominent feature of his genius into a strong light. Perhaps it is because this light is so much that of paradoxical statement, that it is not truer and fuller.

"As Bacon seems to bend all his thoughts to the practice of life," he said, "and to bring home the light of science to 'the bosoms and businesses of men' Sir Thomas Browne seemed to be of the opinion that the only business of life, was to think, and that the proper object of speculation was, by darkening knowledge, to breed more speculation, and 'find no end of wandering mazes lost.'" <sup>1</sup> To complete the contrast of Browne's remoteness from real life with Bacon's practical sense, Hazlitt called Browne "the sublime of indifference," and said that he stood "on the edge of the world of sense and reason," where he gained "a vertigo by looking down at impossibilities and chimeras." <sup>2</sup>

Hazlitt's estimation of Browne is by no means without appreciation, as is shown by the very tone of his utterances. His appreciation of Sidney is of a similar sub-conscious kind, showing itself rather by unintended implication than from any set purpose, and his characterization of Sidney as a prose writer is about as paradoxical, tho more just perhaps. For Sidney, Hazlitt frankly confessed that he could not acquire a taste, and he called "the Arcadia" one of the

.....  
1.- Ibid. V : 333.

2.- Ibid. V : 334.





greatest monuments of the abuse of intellectual power upon record."

"It is not romantic", he said, "but scholastic; not poetry, but casuistry; not nature, but art, and the worst sort of art, which thinks it can do better than nature. Of the number of fine things which are constantly passing through the author's mind, there is hardly one that he has not tried to spoil, and to spoil purposely and maliciously, in order to aggrandize our idea of himself." <sup>1</sup>

Such an utterance is <sup>rather</sup> characteristic of Hazlitt when touched, and there was that in the very fame of Sidney that perhaps tended to render him disagreeable to Hazlitt, who was not partial to courtiers, and who was over-fond of damning - if that be possible - artificiality and affectation in art as well as in life. But in Jeremy Taylor, Hazlitt saw nothing that ruffled him and much that pleased. He said that the genius of Taylor and Browne differed "as that of the painter from the mathematician", and that Taylor's writings were "more like fine poetry than any other prose whatever; - a choral song in praise of virtue, and a hymn to the Spirit of the Universe." If further praise of Taylor were needed he gives it, "When the name of Jeremy Taylor is no longer remembered with reverence", says Hazlitt, "genius will have become a mockery, and virtue an empty shade." <sup>2</sup>

It has already been observed that Hazlitt was intensely and almost exclusively interested in the humanistic qualities of literature, and it is characteristic of his criticism that in his lecture on the prose-writers of the Age of Elizabeth, he went rather exclusively into comparison and contrast of one author with another.

This is equally true both in his treatment of the minor and of the greater dramatists of the lesser lyric poets and also of the four great poets, Chaucer, Spenser, Milton and Shakespere... It is not...

1.- Col. Wks. V : 320.

2.- Ibid. V : 342.



merely a method of Hazlitt, but the natural working of his mind. Perhaps at times it led him all the deeper into paradox and often caused him to take a partial and one-sided view of the author in balancing him against another; but probably the worst fault with this manner of criticism is that too often the critic does not bring in as many objects as are needed to bring out the rounded character of any one writer considered, for a more illuminating method or manner of bringing out the characteristic qualities of an author can not well be imagined. But Hazlitt follows this method in his general views more often than in detail; and he seldom if ever compares lines as Arnold has done in determining the genuine poetical value of a given poem. Hazlitt deals rather with the authors themselves in profile, or the characters they have created, in their general outlines.

A characteristic example of Hazlitt's use of comparison is found in a passage on the four great English poets. "In comparing these four writers together, it might be said that Chaucer excels as the poet of manner, or of real life; Spenser, as the poet of romance; Shakespere as the poet of nature (in the largest use of the term); and Milton, as the poet of morality."<sup>1</sup> Spenser's motive was novelty and the love of the marvelous, said Hazlitt, and his characteristic was remoteness. This may enable us to understand why he calls Spenser the poet of romance, but perhaps it may not always be easy to understand just why he says that Chaucer's characteristic was intensity. It is easier to accept without quibbling, however, his statement that Milton's characteristic was elevation and Shakespere's

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1.- Col. Wks. I : 46.





characteristic was everything, particularly in the latter case,<sup>1</sup> since no two critics can quite agree on any one predominant thing.

In Chaucer, Hazlitt<sup>had</sup> found a gusto in his descriptions of nature, - a local truth and freshness, which gives the very feeling of the air, the coolness or moisture of the ground," and more of a certain "deep, internal, sustained sentiment, than any other writer except Boccaccio!"<sup>2</sup> The characters of Chaucer appealed much to Hazlitt in that "they are every one samples of a kind," and he thinks that "Chaucer's characters modernized, - would be a useful addition to our knowledge of human nature."<sup>3</sup> There was something in Hazlitt's own appreciation of human character akin to that in Chaucer. They both alike "abhorred insipidity" and admired hearty living. A good rogue was of more value in their eyes than a mediocre saint who had nothing more than his saintliness to recommend him.<sup>3</sup> But Hazlitt had no great knowledge of Chaucer's age and can hardly be said to be fully in sympathy with him, at least, not much more than he was in sympathy with Boccaccio. In Spenser, however, Hazlitt found something more modern, and if Chaucer had appealed to him on the side of deep sentiment and vivid reality or gusto, Spenser appealed to him just as strongly on the side of voluptuous fancy and smooth versification.<sup>4</sup> "Spenser excels in two qualities in which Chaucer is most deficient - invention and fancy", writes Hazlitt - "He is the poet of romance. He describes things as in a splendid and voluptuous dream."<sup>4</sup> Hazlitt does not care for the allegory in Spenser, and says that "It might as well be pretended that we cannot see Poussin's pictures for the allegory, as that the allegory prevents us from understanding

1.- Col. Wks. I : 46 - 47

2.- Ibid. V : 27 - 29.

3.- Ibid. V : 24.

4.- Col. Wks. V : 370.



Spenser." <sup>1</sup> Hazlitt's mind was not of the allegorical kind, and this was not the kind of literary interpretation that he concerned himself with very much. What he found most congenial in Spenser was his remoteness from reality,- the romantic escape he offered from the sordid and commonplace. "Of all the poets, he is the most poetical," says Hazlitt. - "Spenser's poetry is all fairy-land. - He paints nature, not as we find it, but as we expected to find it, and fulfills the delightful promise of our youth."<sup>2</sup>

There is perhaps considerably less in Milton that vitally interested Hazlitt than there was in Spenser, and he saw less of the dominant genius of the age in him. "The Genius of Milton was essentially undramatic," says Hazlitt, "he saw all objects from his own point of view, and with certain exclusive preferences."<sup>3</sup> But there was that in the patriotic character of Milton that he loved. Milton had been a consistent rebel against the Stewart tyranny, and something of Hazlitt's admiration for the character of the author attaches itself to the character of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, and he also says that it "may serve to shew that Milton's Satan is not a very insipid personage" since he has been likened by some writers to Napoleon.<sup>4</sup> This remark "serves to shew" at least Hazlitt's own interest in the character of Satan.

It is interesting to note that Hazlitt held that Milton's blank verse, along with Shakespere's, was the only readable blank-verse in

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1.- Ibid. V : 38.

2.- Ibid. V : 35,- Wm. Hazlitt says Spenser's "versification is, at once, the most smooth and the most sounding in the language."  
Col. Wks. V : 44.

3.- Ibid. VIII : 230.

4.- Col. Wks. V : 66.- Leslie Stephen writes in *The Living Age* (1875). 125- 259. on Hazlitt as a critic, "His judgment of an author seems to depend upon two circumstances. He is determined in a great measure by his private associations, and in part by his sympathy for the characters of the writer. \*\* He thinks of an author \*\* as a human being to be loved or hated, or both, like Napoleon, or Gifford, or Southey."





the language. "We imagine," says Hazlitt, "that there are more perfect examples in Milton of musical expression, or of an adaptation of the sound and movement of the verse to the meaning of the passage, than in all our other writers, whether of rhyme or blank verse, put together, (with the exception already mentioned).-- Dr. Johnson and Pope would have converted his vaulting Pegasus into a rocking-horse. Read any other blank verse but Milton's - Thomson's, Young's, Cowper's, Wordsworth's, - and it will be found, from the want of the same insight into 'the hidden sense of harmony', to be mere lumbering prose."<sup>1</sup> Hazlitt also disagrees with Dr. Johnson concerning *Lycidas*, "Of all Milton's smaller poems, Lycidas is the greatest favorite with us. We cannot agree to the charge which Dr. Johnson has brought against it, of pedantry and want of feeling. It is the fine emanation of classical sentiment in a youthful scholar - 'most musical, most melancholy.' A certain tender gloom overspreads it, a wayward abstraction, a forgetfulness of his subject in the serious reflections that arise out of it."<sup>2</sup> This is interesting as showing something of Hazlitt's attitude towards classicism, particularly as contrasted with the attitude of Dr. Johnson. Hazlitt appreciates the classics, but his appreciation is romantic in quality. The "tender gloom" on the face of Milton's classicism is to Hazlitt something that is more Rousseillian than Homeric.

It is significant, I think, that Hazlitt prefers Milton's son-

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1.- Col. Wks. I : 39-41.

2.- Ibid. I : 31.



nets to Shakespere's. He says that those of the latter are "over-charged and monotonous", without any "leading prominent idea in most of them", and he is unable to make head or tail of their "ultimate drift."<sup>1</sup> This only goes to prove that Hazlitt's temper was more classic than medieval, so far as allegory, symbolism, or anything that tended to obscure thought was concerned. He could look over the allegory in Spenser because it was not in his way, but he had no desire to go into the mysteries of Shakespere's sonnets. There have been too many critics since Hazlitt's day who have tried but failed to make head or tail of Shakespere's sonnets, and it was only a characteristic stroke of good judgment that Hazlitt did not try to theorize on them. So far as his liking goes for sonnets, he likes Milton's and Drummond's best. He finds that the latter has made his too much like translations from the Italian, but he says, "I have always been fond of Milton's sonnets for the reason, that they have more of this personal and internal character than any others. -- I do not know indeed but they may be said to be almost the first effusions of this sort of natural and personal sentiment in the language."<sup>2</sup>

Hazlitt, as has been said, was interested in the dramatic literature of the Age of Elizabeth rather than any other aspect, because it contained the greatest and best of the literature of the time and was most closely akin to the life of the Elizabethans. Consequently it is not to be expected that he would give much time to non-dramatic literature outside of Spenser and Milton, and he .....

1.- Col. Wks. VI : 175.

2.- Ibid. VI : 175.





does not. He prefers Drummond's sonnets to Spenser's, on the whole, and far above Sidney's. He likes Ben Johnson's detached pieces considerably. But he becomes an interpreter and critic of the age only when he takes up the drama, and here he is interested so much more in Shakespeare than in any other writer that it is hardly worth while going very deeply into his criticism of the lesser dramatists in order to get his attitude toward the age, except in so far as his appreciation of them shows a broader point of view and a more comprehensive taste. Also his inclusion of the minor dramatists enabled him to trace - tho rather loosely - the development of the drama until the time of Shakespeare, and somewhat of its decline after him.

Of the old plays before Marlowe, Hazlitt considers Gorboduc first in order. What he says of it is rather commonplace and uninspired with any profound insight into its psychology. In fact it is hard for him to become at all enthusiastic over the early plays, meager as they are in human characterization. What he says of Gorboduc may be considered as a typical utterance, so far as these plays are concerned. "Its merit," says Hazlitt, "is confined to the regularity of the plot and metre, to its general good sense, and strict attention to common decorum." <sup>1</sup>

In setting out with the lesser dramatists, Hazlitt says that he wishes to rescue such writers as Webster, Dekker and Marston from obscurity. Concerning the method he expects to use in treating them he says, "I shall not attempt, indeed, to adjust the spelling, or .....

1.- Col. Wks. V : 194.



restore the printing, as if the genius of poetry lay hid in errors of the press, but leaving these weightier matters of criticism to those who are most able and willing to bear the burden, try to bring out their real beauties to the eager sight, 'draw the curtain of Time, and shew the picture of Genius,' restraining my own admiration within reasonable bounds!"<sup>1</sup> This <sup>is a</sup> kind of key-note to all of Hazlitt's criticism. Dryden and his school made Hazlitt think of the stage just as the authors appeared to be thinking of it themselves, but he says that, "the great characteristic of the elder dramatic writers is, that there is nothing theatrical about them."<sup>2</sup> Like Lamb he thought more of Shakespere off than on the stage, and he thought it was an advantage in reading some of the more obscure dramatists of Shakespere's time that he had never seen them acted.<sup>3</sup> "It is the reality of things present to their imaginations," says Hazlitt, "that makes these writers so fine, so bold, and yet so true in what they describe."<sup>4</sup> It was this that gave the "high romantic tone" that appealed so strongly to Hazlitt in Elizabethan literature. In Beaumont and Fletcher he sees the first departure from the genuine dramatic spirit of the age. "With respect to most of the writers of this age", he says, "their subject was their master. Shakespere was alone, as I have said before, master of his subject, but Beaumont and Fletcher were the first who made a plaything of it, or a convenient vehicle for the display of their own powers."<sup>5</sup>

It has already been observed that Hazlitt in his criticism of literature was often principally interested in the personality of the

1.- Ibid. V : 176.

2.- Col. Wks. V : 236.

3.- Col. Wks. V : 246. - Lamb says in his essay "On the Tragedies of Shakespere: "It may seem a paradox, but I cannot help being of opinion that the plays of Shakespere are less calculated for performance on a stage, than those of almost any other dramatist whatever. Their distinguishing excellence is a reason that they should be so." Works of Chas. Lamb. Vol. V. P. 82, (N.Y. 1866.)

4.- Col. Wks. V : 212.

5.- Ibid. V : 248.





author himself or the humanity of the characters which the author had created. This bias toward the personal and the human is shown pretty clearly in his characterizations of the early dramatists. The most happy of these characterizations shows a keen insight into the workings of their genius and a remarkable facility of picking out and fastening upon their characteristic qualities. What he says may not be the whole truth nor always free from the suspicion of paradoxical exaggeration, but nearly always it offers a clue which will lead more or less directly to the original and distinguishing elements of genius in the author he is treating.

What Hazlitt has to say of Marlowe is a typical utterance. "There is a lust of power in his writings," he wrote, "a hunger and thirst after unrighteousness, a glow of the imagination unhallowed by anything but its own energies." <sup>1</sup> It will only require here a reading of Marlowe's *Faustus* and *Tamburlaine* to convince the skeptical reader of Hazlitt. Heywood, says Hazlitt, was "a direct contrast to Marlowe in everything but the smoothness of his verse.-- His manner is simplicity itself. There is nothing supernatural, nothing startling or terrific. He makes use of the commonest circumstances of every-day life, and of the easiest tempers, to shew the workings, or rather the inefficiency of the passions, the vis inertiae of tragedy." <sup>2</sup> Always keeping Shakespere in mind, he observes in speaking of Middleton that his employment of the witches in *The Witch of Edmonton* is not so grand and appalling as that of Shakespere in *Macbeth*, and quotes Lamb, as a re-enforcement of his own opinion

.....  
1.- Col. Wks. V : 202.

2.- Ibid. V : 211 - 212.



that Middleton's witches are the less tragic.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps nothing illustrates better Hazlitt's dislike for the tangential and his affinity for the central in any criticism of literature where his personal prejudices and antipathies were not in question, than his verdict in the last scene in Ford's Broken Heart. Hazlitt is probably not quite just in characterizing Ford as "Finical and fastidious" on the whole, and in saying that he did not find much other power in him "than that of playing with edged tools, and knowing the use of poisoned weapons,"<sup>2</sup> but he cannot be far from right when he speaks of Calantha's behavior in the scene of The Broken Heart. "This is the true false gallop of sentiment; anything more artificial and mechanical I cannot conceive."-says Hazlitt. "The passions may silence the voice of humanity, but it is, I think, equally against probability and decorum to make the passions and the voice of humanity give way (as in the example of Calantha) to a mere form of outward behavior. Such a suppression of the strongest and most uncontrollable feelings can only be justified from necessity, for some great purpose, which is not the case in Ford's play; or it must be done for the effect and éclat of the thing, which is not fortitude but affectation. Mr. Lamb, in his impressive eulogy on this passage in the Broken Heart, has failed (as far as I can judge) in establishing the parallel between this uncalled-for exhibition of stoicism, and the story of the Spartan Boy."<sup>3</sup> The contrast offered

.....  
1.- Ibid. V : 265-269.

2,- Ibid. V;269.

3.- Col. Wks. V : 272 - 273.





by Lamb's enthusiastically sympathetic appreciation of this scene and Hazlitt's rather cynical disapproval of it, mark very well the difference between the nature and genius of the two men. Lamb is most profound in treating humanity in individual cases, and is the more original with the insight of sympathy, in as much as he has more of love for man as the individual when he writes of him; but Hazlitt is the more critical and cool, better adapted to interpret what deals with the individual in literature to the edification of the general mind, for he <sup>is</sup> less sociably inclined toward the individual and knows and loves man best in the abstract, particularly as he sees him in books.<sup>1</sup> He is intensely interested in the individual and the personal, but he applies the principles and feelings he has gotten from the contemplation of society and mankind in general in his attitude toward the individual.

In Ben Johnson, Hazlitt saw a great force of will and intellectual energy "where learning engrafted on romantic tradition or classical history, looks like genius." He was not pleased with Johnson's attempts at comedy. "His tenaciousness of what is grand and lofty, is more praiseworthy than his delight in what is low and disagreeable," said Hazlitt. "His pedantry accords better with didactic pomp than with illiterate and vulgar gabble."<sup>2</sup> This depreciation

1.- Lamb says of this scene "I do not know where to find, in any play, a catastrophe so grand, so solemn, and so surprising, as in this. \* \* \* What a noble thing is the soul, in its strengths and weaknesses! Who would be less weak than Calantha? Who can be so strong? The expression of this transcendent scene almost bears us in imagination to Calvary and the cross" etc. Works of Chas. Lamb. (N.Y. 1866) Vol. IV : 117.-Hazlitt could no more have written Lamb's "The South-Sea House" with its characters, than Lamb could have written the essays in Hazlitt's "Spirit of the Age" or his letters to Gifford.

2.- Col. Wks. V : 263. Hazlitt said that Johnson's fault was that he set himself too much to his subject, and could not let go his hold of an idea," after the insisting on it becomes tiresome or painful to others.



of Johnson as a comedy writer seems less severe and prejudiced when it is remembered that Hazlitt has no great opinion of Shakespere as a comedy writer - at least a much lower opinion of him as a comedy writer than as a writer of tragedy. He saw something nearer to his liking in the comedies of Congreve, and of the play-wrights of the Restoration, when the gallantry and elegance of the court of Charles II, borrowed from France, gave an atmosphere which made possible a comedy of manners, just as the court life of Louis XIV had furnished the background, the setting, and much of the characterization in the comedies of Molière - comedies dear to the heart of Hazlitt.<sup>1</sup>

If Hazlitt showed his appreciation of the Elizabethan genius in his treatment of the lesser dramatists, it was in Shakespere that he delighted most, and it is in his attitude toward Shakespere that he exhibits most clearly his affinity with the romantic qualities that bound the age of Elizabeth to his own. As Leslie Stephen has said, he does not "seem to love Shakespere himself as he loves Rousseau or Richardson," and in his contempt for the sonnets and the non-dramatic poems he shows his indifference to what Sir Leslie, along with a numerous company of other critics, chooses to call "the most Shakespearian parts of Shakespeare." The same author is undoubtedly right, however, when he says, "That which really attracts Hazlitt is sufficiently indicated by the title of his book; he describes the

1.- Hazlitt said "I cannot help thinking, for instance, that Molière was as great, or a greater comic genius than Shakespere, though assuredly I do not think that Racine was as great, or a greater tragic genius," Col. Wks. VIII :31. Confer this view of Hazlitt's with Brander Matthews' in *The Development of the Drama*. Matthews thinks Shakespere's comedies less admirable than those of Molière and not so true to the genre.





characters of Shakespeare's plays. It is Iago, and Timon, and Coriolanus, and Antony, and Cleopatra, who really interest him."<sup>1</sup>

William Gifford, who tried to render Hazlitt's Characters of Shakespeare's Plays contemptible, and who partially succeeded in doing so for a short time, said that Hazlitt's excellencies consisted principally in 'his indestructible love of flowers and odours, and dews and clear waters, and soft airs and sounds, and bright skies, and woodland solitudes, with moonlight bowers'<sup>2</sup>. Nothing could be much farther from the truth. Alexander Ireland, an ardent admirer of Hazlitt, was considered nearer the truth when he said, "This work, although it professes to be dramatic, is in reality a discourse on the philosophy of life and human nature, more suggestive than many approved treatises expressly devoted to that subject."<sup>3</sup> It was in The View of the English Stage and his Dramatic Essays where he sees Shakespeare's characters impersonated by Kean and Miss O'Neill that he treats Shakespeare most strictly as a dramatic writer, but even then it is Shakespeare's characters and not his situations and plots that interest him most.

Hazlitt states that his purpose in writing The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays was to illustrate certain remarks Pope had made on the truth of Shakespeare's characters to nature,<sup>4</sup> particularly in

1.- Living Age. (1875) - 125 : 259.

2.- Quar. Rev. (Jan. 1818). Vol. 18 : 458.

3.- "William Hazlitt" Alex. Ireland, 1889. P.xxv.

4.- Hazlitt says concerning shakespeare's exactness in his delineation of characters and his truth to nature, "We have already observed that Shakespear was scarcely more remarkable for the force and marked contrasts of his characters than for the truth and sublimity with which he has distinguished those which approached the nearest to each other.--The peculiar property of Shakespear's imagination was this truth, accompanied with the unconsciousness of nature; indeed, imagination to be perfect must be unconscious, at least in productions, for nature is so. Col. Wks. I : 294.



regard to their individuality.- Pope has said among other things: "His characters are so much nature herself, that it is a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as copies of her.- --Every single character in Shakespear, is as much an individual as those in life itself."<sup>1</sup> Consequently Hazlitt's task in this work is found to have been chiefly to analyze and characterize the prominent characters. He likes best the sublime types in the tragedies along with the charming women in the romantic comedies. He did not care much for historical plays in themselves, and Falstaff seems to have been what he prized most in them. "If we are to indulge our imaginations, we had rather do it upon an imaginary theme," says Hazlitt, "We think that the actual truth of the particular events, in proportion as we are conscious of it, is a drawback on the pleasure as well as the dignity of the tragedy."<sup>2</sup>

Hazlitt thinks Falstaff "the most substantial comic character that ever was invented", and he sees the secret of Falstaff's wit in "a masterly presence of mind, an absolute self-possession, which nothing can disturb." - "His very size", says Hazlitt, "floats him out of all his difficulties in a sea of rich conceits; and he turns round on a pivot of his conveniences, with every occasion and at a moment's warning. His natural repugnance to every thought or circumstance, of itself makes light of objections, and provokes the most extravagant and licentious answers in his own justification."<sup>3</sup>

Passing from the comic to the tragic, it will suffice to glance at Hazlitt's characterizations of Lear and Hamlet. In Lear

- .....  
 1.- Col. Wks. I :171.  
 2.- Ditto. I : 306.  
 3.- Ditto. I : 279.





he thought he had found Shakespere's best play, because, he says, "it is the one in which he was most in earnest, and the passion which he has taken as his subject is that which strikes its root deepest in the human heart. "It is of course in the character of Lear that he sees the ground on which the play was built. "The mind of Lear" says Hazlitt, "staggering between the weight of attachment and the hurried movements of passion, is like a tall ship driven about with the winds, buffeted by the furious waves, but that still rides above the storm, having its anchor fixed in the bottom of the sea." - - It is his rash haste, his violent impetuosity, his blindness to everything but the dictates of his passions or affections, that produces all his misfortunes, that aggravates his impatience of them, that enforces our pity for him."<sup>1</sup> What he says of Lear is not so strikingly characteristic of him as his delineation of Hamlet's character. "If Lear is distinguished by the greatest depth of passion," says Hazlitt, "HAMLET is the most remarkable for the ingenuity, originality, and unstudied development of character." Some have seen a picture of the moody, melancholy Hazlitt in that which he has drawn of Hamlet. It is rather his manner of bringing the character home to the reader that caused him to make it so personal and vivid, tho there were some things in Hazlitt much like what he found in Hamlet. "It is we who are Hamlet," says Hazlitt. "This play has a prophetic truth, which is above that of history. Whoever has become thoughtful and melancholy through his own mishaps or those of others; whoever has borne about with him the clouded brow of reflection, and thought himself 'too much in the sun'; - - who cannot be well at ease, while he sees evil hovering near like a spectre; whose powers

1.- Col. Works. I : 257- 258.



of action have been eaten up by thought, he to whom the universe seems infinite, and himself nothing; whose bitterness of soul makes him careless of consequences, and who goes to a play as his best resource to shove off, to a second remove, the evils of a life by a mock representation of them - this is the true Hamlet."<sup>1</sup>

In judging the actor on the stage Hazlitt looked almost entirely to the interpretation of character as a final test of ability. In Kean's impersonation of Hamlet he saw "the finest commentary that was ever made on Shakespear. It explained the character at once (as he meant it), as one of disappointed hope, of bitter regret, of affection suspended, not obliterated, by the distraction of the scene around him!"<sup>2</sup> He finds fault with Miss O'Neill because in presenting Juliet her "expression of tenderness bordered on hoydening, and affectation." "The character of Juliet," he said, "is a pure effusion of nature. It is as serious, and as much in earnest, as it is frank and susceptible. It has all the voluptuousness of youthful innocence."<sup>3</sup> He could not bear to see Shakespere mangled by alterations made in his plays, and found him too fine for the stage at best, so it was not easy for an actor to win his applause in playing Shakespere.<sup>4</sup>

DeQuincy found one thing in both Hazlitt and Lamb that he had little patience with - that was their lack of continuity. It is true that Hazlitt seems too fragmentary in his essays oftentimes,

- 1.- Col. Wks. I: 232 -233.
- 2.- Ditto. VIII : 188.
- 3.- Ditto. VIII : 200.
- 4.- Hazlitt says that "the manner which Shakespear's plays have been generally altered, or rather mangled, by modern mechanists, is in our opinion a disgrace to the English stage." Col. Wks. XI: 191.





and this is especially true in The Characters of Shakespear's Plays. Perhaps one reason for the fragmentary appearance of these essays is the large number of long quotations with which he has pasted his comments together. For instance the essays of Julius Caesar has one third of its space filled with quotations.<sup>1</sup> But these quotations are generally well selected for his purpose and they sometimes rather add to the unity of the essay, in feeling, at least, if not in structure. In Julius Caesar these quotations almost tell the whole story in a few lines, so well have they been selected, - making 'a chain of <sup>subtle</sup> rings,' as it were, by showing first the condition of affairs at Rome, then the mutual distrust on the part of Caesar and the conspirators, the fine humanity of Brutus, etc. It is rather a lecture than an essay, however, and will compare unfavorably, considered on the structural side, at least, with Pater's more fully rounded Appreciations of Shakespere's Plays. Hazlitt's essay on Love's Labour's Lost is made up of an introduction of about two-thirds of a page, a quotation of thirty-odd lines, followed by the body of the essay, ( if it may be called that by courtesy, for it is about half the length of the introduction), which is succeeded by another quotation of about thirty lines. The climax is reached, ( in absurdity of structure, if nothing more), by the tailing on of a tag conclusion in a sentence of two dozen words. This compares poorly, not merely in appearance on paper, with Pater's essay on

.....  
 1.- See Col. Wks. I : 195 - 199.



Love's Labour's Lost. Pater does not say all in his first sentence or his first paragraph, as Hazlitt comes too nearly doing sometimes, and Pater has here really taken some pains to analyze the play in his mind. This is shown in the whole structure of Pater's essay as well as in the thought itself, both in quantity and quality. It is true that Hazlitt's essay on Love's Labour's Lost is one of the slightest and least significant in his Characters, partially because he has a poor opinion of the play as a play and as a subject. But it shows only too clearly what is too often apparent in his really serious efforts - a proneness to use quotations out of proportion, and a carelessness for composition which belonged to journalism in its hastiness rather than to literature. This could be more easily overlooked in his contributions to the periodicals of the day on the acted drama, than it can be in his studies of Shakespere's characters. Still this lack of literary form must not be taken too seriously as off-setting his value as a critic or as a writer of literature. Some of his best work as a writer has not been in literary criticism, however, and it is to be deplored that he did not sometimes give more attention to form in that particular field of writing in which his genius showed itself capable of its best and most telling work.

It has been possible to touch only slightly upon the most important feature of Hazlitt's appreciation of Shakespere - his insight into and characterization of human nature in the characters of the plays. But there are other things that Hazlitt finds in Shakespere not less significant perhaps, tho not emphasized so much .....





by him, and treated rather incidentally along with his analysis of the individual and personal. He insists over and over on the universality of Shakespeare's genius, that it included "the genius of all the great men of his age", and with "its power of communication with all other minds," --it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself."<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising therefore that he should read many things in Shakespeare outside of his interest in individual character--things touching society and state broadly. In *Coriolanus* he finds "a storehouse of political commonplaces." The question of political tyranny and political slavery is prominent in it. "The whole dramatic moral of *Coriolanus* is," says Hazlitt, "that those who have little shall have less, and those who have much shall take all that others have left."<sup>2</sup> He sees a social question answered in Shakespeare's treatment of woman. Shakespeare's favorite women, says Hazlitt, "exist almost entirely in the relations and charities of domestic life. They are nothing in themselves, but everything in their attachment to others."<sup>3</sup> Ruskin said almost the same thing about Shakespeare's women a little later in his lecture *On Queen's Gardens*, but he was somewhat more gallant in his choice of language.<sup>4</sup> In the morality of Shakespeare he saw something much like in spirit what the most up-to-date cults of today are professing to teach in their doctrines of the common brother-hood and humanity of man, tho his deductions would hardly warrant the detachment of the altruistic

1.- Col. Wks. V : 47.

2.- Col. Wks. VIII : 347 -349.

3.- Ditto. XI : 290.

4.- See *Sesame and Lilies*. By John Ruskin. (Edited by Herbert Bates).



feeling so completely perhaps from accepted and orthodox creeds as the ethical societies are now teaching it. Shakespere, says Hazlitt, "was a moralist in the same sense in which nature is one. He taught what he had learnt from her. He shewed the greatest knowledge of humanity with the greatest fellow-feeling for it."<sup>1</sup>

The significance of these things that he finds in Shakespere and in the age which he represents, is their modernity and their agreement with <sup>the</sup> teachings and beliefs of the Romantic school to which Hazlitt belonged. His interest in the "high romantic tone" of the age, and in Shakespere's individualistic treatment of character, where "you see their persons", his "uneasy feeling of delight", his "magic power over words, -struck out at a heat", etc., all show Hazlitt was dealing with the very sources of Romanticism, sources, which, like melting snows from inexhaustible heaps on the mountains, feed clear-running springs at their feet, where it requires only the logic of gravitation added to the senses of sight and taste to show the connection. But he seems to be even more modern in his criticism of literature than any of his contemporaries<sup>2</sup>; most probably he had reacted in considerable part against the school to which he belonged and preferred to remain near the centre. Therefore as the literary sense begins to swing back again after its parabolic whirl into the very limbo of Romantic inanity and absurdity, and approaches nearer

1.- Col. Wks. X : 347.

2.- Mr. Sidney Irwin, in the Quarterly Review, (1906), -204:162, says "The noticeable thing in Hazlitt is that, with all his passionate admiration for those authors whom the world has already judged and placed, he writes of Shakespere, Chaucer, and others in a language as modern and much in harmony with the modern view as if he had nothing of that exclusive spirit which we associate with men who are in perfect sympathy with their own age. For one thing, he habitually repeats himself; and there is an unmistakable significance about the word 'romantic' recurring so often; even our favorite antithesis - Classic and Romantic is his also."





to the long established centre of classical excellence, as it now appears to be doing, Hazlitt's reliance upon the suffrage of the ages will come to be more and more respected, even tho his criticism of literature extended little farther back than Shakespere, in whom, unlike Schelling, the great German critic, he scarcely saw 'combined the powers of Aeschylus and Aristophanes, of Dante and Rabelais.'<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

In this chapter it has been seen that Hazlitt was interested principally in the literature of the Elizabethans because it was truly national in spirit and essentially poetic and dramatic in its genius. He sees the origin of the "high romantic tone" of the age not only in the circumstances of the time but in the character of the men who lived and wrote then. Hazlitt traces the causes of the greatness of the age broadly, but his power as a critic is shown best in his analysis and characterization of the individual, not of the mass. His excellence of characterization is admirably shown in his appreciation of the prose writers, Bacon and Taylor; his limitation of charcaterization thru lack of sympathy may be clearly seen in his treatment of Sidney and Browne. He is fond of Chaucer's gusto and of Spenser's 'voluptuous fancy and smooth versification'; but he cares more for the romantic escape found in Spencer's remoteness from reality than he does for the allegory of the Faery Queen.

.....  
1.- See Col. Wks. X : 112. - Hazlitt very clearly saw the difference between the classical and romantic styles in literature and he appreciated the value of each. "Sophocles differs from Shakespear," said Hazlitt, "as a Doric portico does from Westminster Abbey. The principle of the one is simplicity and harmony, of the other richness and power. - The most obvious distinction between the two styles, the classical and the romantic, is that the one is conversant with what are grand or beautiful in themselves, or in consequence of obvious and universal associations; the other, with those that are interesting only by the force of circumstances and imagination."- Col. Wks. V : 348.



He is partial to Milton's blank verse, and rates his sonnets higher than Shakespeare's because he objects to the mystery involved in the latter. It is in Shakespeare, however, that Hazlitt finds a representation of the highest and best qualities of the age; and it is in the analysis and characterization of Shakespeare's characters that he is most interested as a critic, recognizing in them the artist's truth to nature and his universality of genius. In Shakespeare he also finds an insight into most of the social and political questions of his own day, and remarks on some problems that he observes touched upon there which have become even more important since Hazlitt's own time. He cares less for his tragedies, because the latter were truer to the spirit of the age. In Ford's Broken Heart he sees an artificiality and affectation which he deeply hates wherever found, and there, unlike Lamb, his attitude as a critic is central rather than tangential. - As a final word, perhaps, it can be said in dealing with the age of Elizabeth that Hazlitt has shown quite clearly a modernity of view ahead of his time, and has exhibited unmistakably the true bent of his genius for individual characterization, and perhaps nowhere may be better seen his eschewing of the negative side of criticism and his attention to the real beauties of literature in an endeavor to make others feel them as he had felt them himself.





#### IV.

### The Attitude of Hazlitt toward English Literature in the Eighteenth Century.

The eighteenth century was a notable one in the history of English literature. It marked the beginning of the modern school of poetry, and it gave shape to the periodical essay and to the novel, forms of literature which were destined to become of vast importance in the nineteenth century. It also saw the decay and culmination of the Restoration comedy of manners and the pseudo-classical poetry of the Queen Anne schools. This was the century which with its Rousseau and the French Revolution, and with its Richardson and Fielding had done so much toward making Hazlitt what he was. Hence it is doubly important to know what was his attitude toward it in order to understand his position toward the romantic literature of the early nineteenth century, which had its beginning in the eighteenth. His criticism of such writers as Shelley, Byron, and Wordsworth is rendered all the clearer by knowing what was his critical judgment of Pope; and his keen appreciation of Fielding and the English novelists of Richardson's school will show him doing homage to the English genius of common-sense and sentimental realism, just as he had done homage to the national genius of imaginative poetry in the Elizabethan drama. His attitude toward the essayists of the eighteenth century is also significant, particularly his attitude toward Dr. Johnson who repre-

.....



sented so fully the spirit of pseudo-classicism. To compare, even in some slight degree, the critical opinions of Johnson and Hazlitt on the early romantic poets must certainly be of some aid not only in showing more clearly what was Hazlitt's peculiar position in the Romantic Movement in England, but also it must contribute somewhat toward a final estimate of Hazlitt as a critic of literature.

Since the time of Shakspeare, in no department of literature, perhaps, had such a great change taken place as in that of the drama. In the Restoration comedy Hazlitt had seen something almost equal to Moliere's comedy in representing the manners of the age;<sup>1</sup> but when the stage ceased to imitate real life he no longer cared for it. He saw the decline of the comedy beginning with Farquhar and the attack made on the stage by Jeremy Collier.<sup>2</sup> "The comedies of Steele were the first," says Hazlitt, "that were written expressly with a view not to imitate the manners, but to reform the morals of the age. I am unwilling to believe that the only difference between right and wrong is mere cant, or make-believe."<sup>3</sup>

Outside of Sheridan's comedies and Gay's Beggar's Opera,  
 .....

<sup>1</sup> Hazlitt, in speaking of the Restoration comedy, says, "The four principal writers of this style of comedy (which I think the best) are undoubtedly Wycherly, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar. The dawn was in Etherege, as its latest close was in Sheridan.— It is hard to say which of these four is best, or in what each of them excels, they had so many and such great excellences." Col. Wks., VIII: 70.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, VIII: 89.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, VIII: 157.





Hazlitt saw little worth in the later eighteenth century comedy. He found no soul in Steele's plays, "either of good or bad; and in such works as Sheridan's plays and Lillo's *George Barnwell* he saw little more than caricature and improbability".<sup>1</sup> He thought that comedy had worn itself out, and that the criticism which the stage exercised upon public manners had been fatal to comedy, "by rendering the subject matter of it tame, correct, and spiritless."<sup>2</sup> What he found still remaining in the eighteenth century drama that he could unqualifiedly praise were mostly remnants from the bargain counter of Restoration comedy. What these remnants were, may be seen in his remarks on the works of Sheridan, Gay, and Mrs. Centlivre. In the latter he saw almost the last of those writers who ventured to remain in the "prohibited track", and he says her plays "have a provoking spirit and volatile salt in them, which still preserves them from decay".<sup>3</sup> The great excellence of Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, which Hazlitt liked best of Sheridan's plays, he found "in the invention of comic situations, and the lucky contrast of different characters."<sup>4</sup> Hazlitt was particularly fond of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, and in much the same way that he was fond of Hogarth and

.....

<sup>1</sup> Hazlitt calls *George Barnwell* "one of the most improbable and purely artificial fictions we have ever seen" (Col.Wks. VIII: 268). He thinks that Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* "with all its shifting vivacity, is rather a sportive and whimsical effusion of the author's fancy, a delightful and delicately managed caricature, than a genuine comedy". Ibid, VIII: 164.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, VIII: 150.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, VIII: 155.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, VIII: 251.



Fielding. He never tires in his praise of it. He called it "inimitable", an adjective which should be used in describing only the masterpieces of an original genius; and perhaps here Hazlitt has allowed his partiality of feeling to blind his critical judgment somewhat. Present day critics<sup>would</sup> hardly allow that the Beggar's Opera, as Hazlitt claims, "unites those two good things, sense and sound, in a higher degree than any other performance on the English or (as far as we know) on any other stages."<sup>1</sup>

If Hazlitt saw little on the whole in eighteenth century drama he saw much in the eighteenth century novel. One cause of Hazlitt's fondness for Richardson, Fielding, and others of that school was their inherent democracy of feeling. He remarks on the fact that the "four best novel-writers" and some of the "best writers of the middle style of comedy"<sup>2</sup> lived and wrote during the reign of George II when "the establishment of the Protestant ascendancy, and the succession of the House of Hanover", appeared to have given a "more popular turn to our literature, and genius, as well as to our government." And Hazlitt adds, "It was found high time that the people should be represented in books as well as in Parliament. They wished to see some account of themselves in what they read; and not to be confined always to the vices, the miseries, and frivolities of .....

<sup>1</sup>Col.Wks. VIII: 254.

<sup>2</sup>It is to be noticed here that Hazlitt also includes the "inimitable Hogarth" among the brilliant lights of this period. See Col.Wks. VIII: 121-122.





the great."<sup>1</sup> The significance of this view is in its romantic and revolutionary nature. Hazlitt is saying just what Godwin and others had been proclaiming. The extent of Hazlitt's feeling on this subject is shown still more clearly when he adds that "In despotic countries human nature is not of sufficient importance to be studied or described."

But Hazlitt did not love Richardson and Fielding for the sake of any favorite or pet principle he may have held. He had become intimately acquainted with them early in his life,<sup>2</sup> and he had found something very congenial in them both. He recognized and appreciated a characteristic genius in each of the leading novelists, the sentimental realism of Richardson's characterizations of men and women, particularly of women; the depth of insight into human nature and the vast amount of strong English common-sense he found in Fielding; the humorous caricatures of humanity in Smollet; and the inventiveness in characterization and the fragmentary brilliancy of style that belonged to Sterne.

It is characteristic of Hazlitt's method of criticism that he makes little attempt to show any definite influence of Cervantes and Le Sage upon the English novelists, but chooses instead to devote several pages to an appreciation of Don Quixote and Gil Blas without other stated excuse than that they had been naturalized in England. The truth of the matter is that he is .....

<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. VIII: 121-122.

<sup>2</sup> See Ch. I of this dissertation.



not at all interested in any such scholarlike proceeding as looking up and establishing points of resemblance and exact works of influence. He is pretty well content with the observation that "Fielding is more like Don Quixote than Gil Blas; and Smollet is more like Gil Blas than Don Quixote", and that "there is not much resemblance in either case."<sup>1</sup> What he has done was to recognize the resemblance in kind, without proceeding to an analysis of detail, and then to sketch in Don Quixote and Gil Blas as a sort of background for Tom Jones and Pamela, and for Tristram Shandy and Roderick Random.

It is at once apparent what Hazlitt means by seeing more of Don Quixote and less of Gil Blas in Fielding than in Smollet when he says that "the leading characters in Don Quixote are strictly individuals" and that "there is little individual character in Gil Blas", and then proceeds to classify Fielding "as an observer of the character of human life", and Smollet as a describer of its various eccentricities.<sup>2</sup> In Sterne he sees "more of mannerism and affectation, - - - and a more immediate reference to preceding authors." But he finds much that is excellent in Sterne, in spite of his faults, and likens his characters, in their being "intellectual and inventive", to Richardson's, though he thinks them quite the opposite in "execution".

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<sup>1</sup>Col.Wks. VIII: 112. - Hazlitt here says also that Sterne's Tristram Shandy was a more direct instance of imitation, and that Richardson can scarcely be called an imitator of anyone, unless it was of the sentimental refinement of Merivaux or of the "verbose gallantry" of the seventeenth century.

<sup>2</sup>Col.Wks. VIII: 112.





"The one", he says, "are made out by continuity, and patient repetition of touches; the others, by glancing transitions and graceful apposition."<sup>1</sup>

In Richardson and Fielding he was most interested, and his characterization of the genius of these two authors is in his best vein. "Richardson" he said, "seemed to spin his materials entirely out of his own brain, as if there had been nothing existing in the world beyond the little room in which he sat writing. There is an artificial reality about his works, which is no where else to be met with. They have the romantic air of a pure fiction, with the literal minuteness of a common diary. The author had the strongest matter-of-fact imagination that ever existed, and wrote the oddest mixture of poetry and prose. He does not appear to have taken advantage of anything in actual nature, from one end of his works to the other; and yet, throughout all his works, voluminous as they are - (and this, to be sure, is one reason why they are so,) - he sets about describing every object and transaction, as if the whole had been given in on evidence by an eye-witness. This kind of high finishing from imagination is an anomaly in the history of human genius; and certainly nothing so fine was ever produced by the same accumulation of minute parts."<sup>2</sup> The feeling of

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<sup>1</sup>Col.Wks. VIII: 121.

<sup>2</sup>Col.Wks. VIII: 117-118.



reality in Richardson's works affected Hazlitt so strongly that he said "the effect of reading Sir Charles Grandison was like an increase of kindred."<sup>1</sup>

Hazlitt's characterization of Fielding is just as typical as that of Richardson. "Fielding's novels are, in general, " he says, "thoroughly his own; and they are thoroughly English. What they are most remarkable for, is neither sentiment, nor imagination, nor wit, nor even humour, though there is an immense deal of this last quality; but profound knowledge of human nature, at least of English nature; and masterly pictures of the characters of men as he saw them existing. This quality distinguishes all his works, and is shown almost equally in all of them. As a painter of real life, he was equal to Hogarth,<sup>2</sup> as a mere observer of human nature, he was little inferior to Shakspeare, though without any of the genius and poetical qualities of his mind."<sup>3</sup>

It is in such passages as these just quoted, - which can hardly be given piece-meal, that Hazlitt shows himself at his best, handling each author separately, picking out the characteristic quality of genius and fastening on it in such a way that his meaning can hardly escape the reader. Perhaps the finest thing about such criticism as this - which consists more

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<sup>1</sup>Col.Wks. VIII: 118.

<sup>2</sup>It is to be remarked here that Hazlitt has given an entire lecture to Hogarth in his English Comic Writers, - thus showing the high regard he had for him and also the way in which he looked upon Hogarth's works as being closely related to the novel. See Col. Wks. VIII: 133.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. VIII: 112-113.





in characterization than in interpretation according to any established principles of philosophical truth or esthetic and artistic, or even moral values - is the kind of insight which relates the author to the center of life itself, or, at least, to something which is of vital interest to living people. Hazlitt realized that his favorite novelists were no longer, even in his own time, very popular, but he said that "people of sense and imagination, who look beyond the surface or the passing folly of the day, will always read Tom Jones".<sup>1</sup> There seems to be some reason to believe that this statement is yet to go on record as truly prophetic. Certainly it is pretty safe to say that Hazlitt realized very fully the importance of the novel as a permanent form of literature - something that before him few critics seem to have done in any such thorough-going fashion. It is to his credit, that he saw when he did, the value of the novel as a part of literature which could not be ignored - presaging as it were the splendid work which the nineteenth century was to achieve in fiction - a work which, if we except the novels of Scott, had hardly yet been begun when Hazlitt died in 1830.<sup>2</sup>

Just as in dealing with Shakspeare, Hazlitt was more interested in the characters of the drama than in anything else, so in dealing with the novel he felt most keenly when he was concerned with its characters. He was in love with Richardson's women and could have written the characters of Richardson's and

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. XII: 374.

<sup>2</sup> Dicken's first important work was done about 1836, Thackeray's and Reade's still later. See Chronological Outlines of English Literature, by Frederick Ryland, pp. 194-208.



Fielding's novels with about as much gusto as he had written "The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays'" But it would be a mistake to think that Hazlitt saw nothing more than the figures of the hero and heroine in the novel . "We find there" says Hazlitt, "a close imitation of men and manners; we see the very web and texture of society as it really exists, and as we meet with it when we come into the world. If poetry has 'something more divine in it'; this savours more of humanity. We are brought acquainted with the motives and characters of mankind, imbibe our notions of virtue and vice from practical examples, and are taught a knowledge of the world through the 'airy medium of romance'. As a record of past manners and opinions, too, such writings afford the best and fullest information. For example, I should be at a loss where to find in any authentic documents of the same period so satisfactory an account of the 'general state of society, and of moral, political, and religious feeling in the reign of George II, as we meet with in the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his friend Mr. Abraham Adams'."¹

In order to understand Hazlitt's appreciation of Pope, as well as his attitude toward the romantic poets of the eighteenth century, it is necessary to observe a certain distinction he makes between an artificial style and a natural style in poetry. "Dryden and Pope are the great masters of the artificial style of poetry in our language", he says, " as the poets

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¹Col.Wks. VIII: 106-107.





of whom I have already treated, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton, were the natural; and though this artificial style is generally and very justly acknowledged to be inferior to the other, yet those who stand at the head of that class, ought, perhaps, to rank higher than those who occupy an inferior place in a superior class. - - - - Young, for instance, Gray, or Akenside, only follow in the train of Milton and Shakspeare; Pope and Dryden walk by their side, though of an unequal stature, and are entitled to a first place in the lists of fame."<sup>1</sup>

The argument which Hazlitt has used to justify the position he has taken in regard to Dryden and Pope marks him as one of the least esoteric of critics. It is his reliance upon the judgment of the people, something as has already been remarked, he held in common with Rousseau. "This seems to be not only the reason of the thing", he writes, "but the common sense of mankind, who, without any regular process of reflections, judge of the merit of a work, not more by its inherent and absolute worth, than by its originality and capacity of gratifying a different faculty of the mind, or a different class of readers; for it should be recollected, that there may be readers (as well as poets) not of the highest class, though very good sort of people, and not altogether to be despised."<sup>2</sup> It is not until he comes to the criticism of his own contemporaries that he is deprived of this support - the established judgement

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. V: 68-69.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, V: 69.



of the people - and even there he sometimes uses it, as it may be found in comparing new authors with old authors, as a kind of ballast to his own judgment.

Hazlitt recognized Dryden's excellence as a prose-writer, and held him to be a bolder and stronger writer than Pope; but to the latter he assigns a "refinement and delicacy of feeling", that the former never possessed. Hazlitt's characterization of Pope is one of his best, and as Professor Saintsbury has shown, it is very interesting as a type of the kind of 'critical deliverance' in which Hazlitt surpassed - his separate treatment of single authors and works where his power of characterization could work with most advantage.<sup>1</sup> - "He had none of the enthusiasm of poetry", said Hazlitt, "he was in poetry what the skeptic is in religion. It cannot be denied, that his chief excellence lay more in diminishing than in aggrandizing objects; in checking, not in encouraging our enthusiasm; in sneering at the extravagances of fancy or passion, instead of giving loose to them; in describing a row of pins and needles rather than the embattled spears of Greeks and Trojans".<sup>2</sup> He found none of the rough work in Pope that he saw in Shakspeare - nothing of the tempestuous passion and the deeper tragic things of life. "Yet", exclaimed .....

<sup>1</sup>The Pope passage is specially interesting", says Saintsbury, "because it leads as to the second and, as it seems to me, the chief and principal class of Hazlitt's critical deliverances - those in which, without epideictic intention, without, or with but a moderate portion of rhetoric and amplification and phrasemaking, he handles separate authors and works, and pieces." A Hist. of Criticism, (N.Y. 1904), III: 255.

<sup>2</sup>Col.Wks.. V: 71.





Hazlitt, "within this retired and narrow circle how much, and that how exquisite, was contained! What discrimination, what wit, what delicacy, what fancy, what lurking spleen, what elegance of thought, what pampered refinement of sentiments; It is like looking at the world through a microscope, where every thing assumes a new character and a new consequence, where things are seen in their minutest circumstances and slightest shades of difference; where the little becomes gigantic, the deformed beautiful, and the beautiful, deformed."<sup>1</sup>

In the Rape of the Lock, Hazlitt found the finest example of the sort of excellence he sees in Pope. "It is the most exquisite specimen of fillagree work ever invented,"<sup>2</sup> he says. He calls it "a double-refined essence of wit and fancy, as the Essay on Criticism is of wit and sense."<sup>3</sup> In praising the Essay on Criticism Hazlitt agrees with Dr. Johnson, but he would hardly go so far as to say with the author of "The Lives of the Poets" that "it exhibits every mode of excellence that can embellish or dignify didactick composition."<sup>4</sup> He does not agree with Johnson when the latter says Pope "gathered his notions fresh from reality, not from the copies of authors, but the originals of Nature."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. V: 71-72.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, V: 72.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, V: 73.

<sup>4</sup> The Works of Samuel Johnson. Edited by the Rev. Robert Lynam. London, 1825, Vol. 4: 256.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 4: 246.



Hazlitt maintains instead, that Pope "was, in a word, the poet not of nature but of art," and that unlike Skakespeare he judged by opinion, and did not write from intuition. He is hardly sure, in the strict sense of the word, that Pope is a poet, but he is very willing to admit that he possessed "exquisite faculties", a most "refined taste", and was a great writer.<sup>1</sup> Where he disagrees with Johnson is in calling Pope an artificial poet instead of a natural one. Pope belonged to the age of Dryden. and he had the manners of that age - a manner that Hazlitt calls vicious. "Dryden's plays are perhaps the fairest specimen of what this manner was," says Hazlitt. "I do not know how to describe it better than by saying it is one continued and exaggerated common-place!"<sup>2</sup> Holding such an attitude as this statement would indicate, it is to Hazlitt's credit as a critic that he saw as much in Pope as he did, and it is still more to his credit that he ascribed nothing to him but the kind of excellence that really belonged to his age and school, - wit, refined sense, and taste, and a delightful play of fancy in dealing with the trivial and common-place.<sup>3</sup> "Compared with Chaucer," says Hazlitt, "Dryden and the rest of that school were merely verbal poets. They had a great deal of wit, sense, and fancy; they only wanted truth and depth of feeling."<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps no better method of showing in brief space what

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. XI: 430-431.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, V: 357.

<sup>3</sup> Hazlitt recognized Butler's excellence in the kind of writing which was being done in the Age of Dryden and Pope. "The greatest single production of wit of this period, I might say of this country, is Butler's Hudibras," writes Hazlitt. "It contains specimens of every variety of drollery and satire, and those specimens crowded together into almost every page. The proof of this is, that nearly one half of his lines are got by heart." Ibid. VIII: 62.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. IX: 72.





Hazlitt's attitude was toward the Romantic poets of the eighteenth century, can be employed than that of quoting his epigrammatical characterizations of representative poets as Thomson, Young, Cowper, Gray, Collins, Goldsmith, and Burns, - and by showing what his position was toward certain extreme and significant types as Ossian and Chatterton. But it must be borne in mind that the early Queen Anne poetry by a strong light from the fierce flame of contemporary feeling that was raging as much as anywhere, in Hazlitt's own breast, so it will not be possible perhaps to make quite clear what his particular attitude toward such writers as Thomson, Gray, and Chatterton really was, until his relations with his contemporaries have been looked into. It has already been seen, however, how he looked upon Pope's school as one of refined artificiality, almost devoid of natural and spontaneous feeling.

Hazlitt has little liking on the whole for Young and Gray, nor does he care much for Shenstone. Thomson he thought more of, calling him "the best and most original of our descriptive poets." He allowed other poets had been equal to him in treating the details of nature, but none in describing "the sum total of their effects."<sup>1</sup> He brands Young as "meretricious", and calls his wit, fancy, and sublimity all false.<sup>2</sup> Shenstone,  
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<sup>1</sup>Col.Wks. V: 87.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. V: 374. Johnson however praised Young for having "exhibited a very wide display of original poetry" in his Night Thoughts. See "The Works of Dr. Samuel Johnson", Lyman (London, 1825) III: 373.



he said, "only wanted to be looked at",<sup>1</sup> He calls Shenstone's Schoolmistress "a perfect poem", but most of his others "indifferent and tasteless." Of the poets who have tried their hands only at short pieces, Hazlitt thinks that Collins "is probably the one who has shown the most of the highest qualities of poetry<sup>2</sup> - - - - "He had that true vivida vis, that genuine inspiration, which alone can give birth to the highest efforts of poetry."<sup>3</sup> He thinks more highly of Collin's poetic genius than he does of Gray's, though he admits that Gray missed the highest things "only by a hair's breadth", and finds the cause of his failure to attain his aims in "too great an ambition after the ornaments and machinery of poetry."<sup>4</sup>

Goldsmith, Hazlitt thought, was "one of the most delightful writers in the language."<sup>5</sup> "One should have his own pen", says Hazlitt, "to describe him as he ought to be described - amiable, various and bland, with careless inimitable grace touching on every kind of excellence - with manners unstudied, but a gentle heart-performing miracles of skill from pure happiness of nature, and whose greatest fault was ignorance of his own worth."<sup>6</sup> What he says of Burns is in the same characteristic vein. "In naïveté, in spirit, in characteristic humour, in vivid description of natural objects and of the natural feelings of the

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. V:119.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. V:374.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. V:118.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. V:375.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. V:375.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. V:119.





heart, he has left behind him no superior."<sup>1</sup> "He was as much of a man - not a twentieth part as much of a poet as Shakespere. With but little of his imagination or inventive power, he had the same life of mind. - - - His pictures of good fellowship, of social glee, of quaint humour, are equal to anything; they come up to nature, and they cannot go beyond it."<sup>2</sup> His comparison of Burns to Shakespere is not more remarkable perhaps than his comparison of Burns to Wordsworth, where dissimilarity instead of similarity is the striking thing. "Mr. Wordsworth's poetry is the poetry of mere sentiment and pensive contemplation", says Hazlitt, "Burn's is a very highly sublimated essence of animal existence."<sup>3</sup> Looking at Burns as he did, it is only natural that he should call Tam O'Shanter, in its kind, Burn's's masterpiece, for Tam O'Shanter is itself the essence both of "good fellowship" and "animal existence".

It is to be remarked in nearly all that Hazlitt has said of the Romantic poets of the eighteenth century he has tried to do, and in most cases has done, just what he attempted to do in treating Pope - to pick out the particular excellence most characteristic of the author's genius and to hold that excellence up to view in as many lights as he could bring to bear upon it and its relations. His method is dogmatic and strikes at the centre. He deals rather with the individual author than with the movement in which he finds the author. His prejudices seldom prevents his seeing the individual excellence of genius, though it sometimes causes him to underrate or overrate its value. It

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. V:376.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. V:128.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. V:131.



only shows the romantic temper which Hazlitt had in common with his generation when he puts Ossian along with Homer, the Bible, and Dante as one of the "four of the principal works of poetry in the world."<sup>1</sup> Such a statement seems too ridiculously absurd to be considered seriously now, unless we remember what Ossian meant to Goethe and to many of the greatest of his contemporaries.<sup>2</sup> It is rather comforting to find that Hazlitt does not look upon Chatterton with any of that extravagance of enthusiastic admiration which tended to make him out a Shakespere "nipped in the bud". Perhaps he is too depreciative when he says that Chatterton "did not shew extraordinary powers of genius, but extraordinary precocity. Nor do I believe he would have written better, had he lived. He knew this himself, or he would have lived. Great geniuses, like great kings, have too much to think of to kill themselves."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Col. Wks. V:15. In Ossian he sees "the decay of life, and the lag end of the world." Had he said the "lag end" of literature he would perhaps be more in harmony with most present-day criticism. Dr. Johnson in speaking to Reynolds about Ossian, exclaimed, "Sir, a man might write such stuff forever, if he would abandon his mind to it." See H. A. Beers in "A Hist. of Eng. Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century", New York, 1910: p.313.

<sup>2</sup>Josef Texte says, concerning the place of Ossian in the European literature of this period, "On a essayé jadis de prouver à Macpherson qu'il n'était qu'un imposteur de talent. Mais, authentiques ou non, les poèmes, d'Ossian restent un monument de l'histoire littéraire européenne, et on ne fera pas que Chateaubriand n'ait mis Ossian au - dessus d'Homère." "Jean Jacques Rousseau et les Origines de le Cosmopolitisme", p.453.

<sup>3</sup>Col.Wks. V:122.





In his lecture, "On the Periodical Essayists", in the series on the Comic Writers - which, by the way, includes a good many writers who were anything but really comic - Hazlitt has some interesting things to say of the Spectator and the Tatler, and their kind. Montaigne he calls "the first person who in his Essays led the way to this kind of writing among the moderns."<sup>1</sup> It is all the more interesting to hear what Hazlitt has to say of a kind of writing in which he himself excelled - that of the miscellaneous essays. It is also interesting to know that he finds "a much greater proportion of commonplace matter" in the Spectator than in the Tatler, and that he thinks Steele "a less artificial and more original writer" than Addison.<sup>2</sup> But what he has to say of Dr. Johnson is of a peculiar significance, even though he is speaking here of Johnson the essayist rather than Johnson the critic; for Johnson was in a certain and peculiar sense a representative of the neo-classicism of the eighteenth century, and reflected much of the temper of the age in which he was bred. There was something in his sturdy opposition to the rising romanticism of the latter half of the century, that makes one think of Hazlitt's own uncompromising attitude toward some of his contemporaries. In criticising Johnson's literary work, Hazlitt is criticising the pseudo-classical spirit of the early eighteenth century, and in praising his integrity of manhood and his ability and power in conversa-

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<sup>1</sup>Col.wks. VIII: 92.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. VIII: 97.



tion he is doing honor to some of the sturdy English qualities, the qualities of common sense and manly feeling among others - that Hazlitt had delighted to find in the novels of Fielding and Smollet.

Hazlitt finds little originality in Johnson, though he thinks he had as much originality of thought as had Addison. "The Rambler", he says, "is a splendid and imposing common-place-book of general topics, and rhetorical declamation on the conduct and business of human life. In this sense, there is hardly a reflection that had been suggested on such subjects which is not to be found in this celebrated work, and there is, perhaps, hardly a reflection to be found in it which had not been already suggested and developed by some other author, or in the common course of conversation."<sup>1</sup> Not only does he see the common-place and borrowed type of content prevailing in the Queen Anne literature, but he finds the same artificiality of style in Johnson that he had found in the other writers of that period. He observes that Johnson's style resembled "the rumbling of mimic thunder" heard at the theatres, and that "the light he throws upon a subject is like the dazzling effect of phosphorus, or an ignis fatuus of words."<sup>2</sup> Such remarks only tend to prove that Hazlitt saw in Johnson a pretty complete caricature of the Alexandrian Age of literature. He does not find the refinement of Pope in him, nor the splendid boldness of Dryden's prose-style.  
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<sup>1</sup>Col.Wks. VIII: 100.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. VIII: 101.





It is their artificiality of manner and their commonplaceness of subject-matter combined with a certain pompous dignity that he sees in Johnson. It is noteworthy that as a critic Hazlitt disagrees with Johnson nearly everywhere, except in the case of Gray and perhaps a few others. Johnson likes Shakespere's comedies best while Hazlitt thought least of them;<sup>1</sup> Johnson said of Milton's Lycidas that "the diction was harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing", finding neither nature nor truth in it;<sup>2</sup> but Hazlitt was particularly struck with this poem. In fact Hazlitt makes a kind of buffer of Johnson's Lives of the Poets in his own criticism, seldom agreeing with him to the extent of praising his judgment in the case of the metaphysical poets, Donne, Butler, Cowley, and their kind, where he quotes Johnson at some length and observes that "it was a subject for which Dr. Johnson's powers both of thought and expression were better fitted than any other man's." And he adds "If he had had the same capacity for following the finer touches of nature, that he had felicity and force in detecting and exposing the aberrations from the broad and beaten path of propriety and common sense, he would have amply deserved the reputation he has acquired as a philosophical critic."<sup>3</sup> This sounds very modern, coming as it does from one critic dealing with another, and it serves to show Hazlitt's attitude toward the century. Not less.

<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. VIII: 30.

<sup>2</sup> The Works of Samuel Johnson. Edited by Lyman. London, 1825. Vol. III: 259.

<sup>3</sup> Col. Wks. VIII: 49.



modern and still more creditable perhaps to Hazlitt's accuracy of insight is his real appreciation of Johnson, when he says, "The most triumphant record of the talents and character of Johnson is to be found in Boswell's Life of him. The man was superior to the author. - - - - The life and dramatic play of his conversation forms a contrast to his written works."<sup>1</sup>

It has already been observed how Hazlitt disagreed with Johnson on Shakespere's comedies and on Miltons elegy, Lycidas. It is perhaps hardly necessary to compare their conflicting views on the Ossianic poems, but considerable light may be brought to bear upon their respective attitudes toward the entire romantic movement in the eighteenth century by comparing their critical opinions of Shakespere and of the old ballad poetry. "Spenser", says William Lyon Phelps, "was the poet of Romanticism as Pope was of Classicism".<sup>2</sup> Professor Beers attests to the influence of the ballad poetry when he says, "What scholars and professional men of letters had sought to do by their imitations of Spenser and Milton, and their domestication of the Gothic and the Celtic muse, was much more effectually done by Percy and the ballad collectors."<sup>3</sup>

It has already been observed<sup>4</sup> that Hazlitt was particularly in love with Spenser's smooth versification and voluptuous imagination which carried him into a fairyland of fancy, away from the dull reality of things, and also how he had ignored the allegory. It is interesting to know that Johnson's opinions of

<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. VIII: 100-101.

<sup>2</sup> "The English Romantic Movement" (Boston, 1904) p.46.

<sup>3</sup> "A Hist. of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century. (N.Y. 1910) p.265.

<sup>4</sup> See Ch. III of this dissertation.





Spenser were exactly the opposite of Hazlitt's. "To imitate the fictions and sentiments of Spenser," says Johnson, "can incur no reproach, for allegory is perhaps one of the most pleasing vehicles of instruction. But I am very far from extending the same respect to his diction or his stanza." He thinks that Spenser's style might perhaps by long labor be copied," but", he says, "life is surely given us for higher purposes than to gather what our ancestors have wisely thrown away, and to learn what is of no value, but because it has been forgotten.<sup>1</sup>" This was setting himself directly against the current of the rising romanticism, of which one principal phase was its Spenserian Revival with its numerous imitations. But Johnson's attitude toward ballads was certainly no less antagonistic and decided. Not only does he make sport of the ballad-stanza with his burlesque parodies on it, but he finds nothing of much worth in the best of the ballads, either in style or content. "In 'Chevy-Chase'", he writes, "there is not much of either bombast or affectation; but there is chill and lifeless imbecility. The story cannot possibly be told in a manner that shall make less impression on the mind."<sup>2</sup> Hazlitt's feeling toward the ballads was just the opposite of this. Speaking of one of the old Scotch ballads, Auld Robin Gray, he remarks, "the effects of reading this old ballad is as if all our hopes and fears hung upon the last fibre of the heart, and we felt that giving away. What silence, what loneliness....."

<sup>1</sup> See the Works of Dr. Samuel Johnson. Edited by Lyman. London, 1825. Vol.II:5-6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. III: 592.



ness, what leisure for grief and despair."<sup>1</sup> In this cold indifference of Johnson and this deep emotional sympathy of Hazlitt for the ballads, may be found the key-note of each in their criticism of the Romantic poetry of the eighteenth century.

The purpose of this chapter has been to show the nature of Hazlitt's attitude toward the eighteenth century in respect to the drama, to Richardson, and his school of novelists, to the Queen Anne school of poetry, and to the romantic movement as seen in his criticisms of the later eighteenth century poets and in his taking issue with Dr. Johnson, the defender of pseudo-classicism. The results of this investigation may be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Hazlitt finds little of worth in the eighteenth century drama after the time of Farquhar, outside of the Beggar's Opera and Sheridan's School for Scandal - survivals of the Restoration Comedy. He has no patience with Steele's sentimental drama with its moral preachments, condemning it for its failure to reflect the manners of the people.

2. In the eighteenth century novel he sees a genuine expression of the English national genius working on a democratic basis, <sup>with</sup> which he is in full sympathy. He finds in Fielding a type of English common-sense combined with a deep insight into human nature, and in Richardson an inimitable power of invention

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. of Wm. Hazlitt. V: 141.





and a deep sentimental realism. Not only is he an ardent lover of Fielding and Richardson, but he **has** a very modern conception of the novel as a form of literature, which, while having less of the divine in it than poetry, yet has more of the human.

3. He would not place Pope and Dryden and their school in the same category as Shakespere and Chaucer, but would put them at the head of the poets of the artificial style. He sees a rare excellence in Pope's refined taste and delicacy of perception.

4. Hazlitt discriminates very sharply in his criticism of the romantic poets - rejecting Young and Shenstone as poseurs who are thinking more of themselves than of their subjects, but warmly praising Thomson as a writer who, not without serious defects, is yet the most original of our descriptive poets. Goldsmith he finds "delightful", and in Burns he sees a poet without a superior in a certain kind of poetry where a characteristic humor and feeling of good fellowship is combined with a very vivid and sympathetic power of interpreting and describing natural objects.

5. Hazlitt takes issue with Dr. Johnson on Milton, Ossian, Spenser, and ballad-poetry; but he does homage to Johnson's strong common-sense and sterling manhood, taking in fact much of the modern attitude - one which prefers Boswell's Johnson on the whole, to the Johnson found in his own writings.

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V.

Hazlitt and his Contemporaries.

Hazlitt's position among his contemporaries was a unique and peculiar one, and his relations toward the age in which he lived were of such a complex nature that it becomes extremely difficult to judge him as a critic of its literature. It is not always easy to distinguish the critic in him from the revolutionary politician, nor is it always easy to tell just how many of his words he would have us take unqualifiedly in some of his paradoxical passages where a strong wave of personal feeling has swept him quite off his feet and far above the high-water mark of literal truth. Only a complete reading of all he has to say on such writers as Coleridge and Wordsworth, or Scott and Southey, will show his genuine estimation of them and their work, for, as Barry Cornwall has well said, he had at one time or another done everyone justice.<sup>1</sup> There were few of the prominent men of his day with whom he had not been acquainted, and of whom he had not in some measure enjoyed the friendship. But with most of these he sooner or later fell out and came to look upon as enemies, and

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Cornwall wrote of Hazlitt, "He was always for a man having fair play at one time or another. - - - He resembled, it is true, all persons who meet in hostility; he sometimes saw only the adverse face of his enemies, as his enemies saw nothing but what was objectionable in him. But that he could cast aside all political feeling, all personal animosity, and do justice to the partisans of an opposite faction is evident. There is no one who has given greater measure of praise to the writings of Mr. Wordsworth and Sir Walter Scott. No one has said such fine things of the unprofitable genius of Mr. Coleridge. See "list of (over)"





generally the disagreement arose over politics,- over Legitimacy which he hated, or over the Revolution and Napoleon, objects of his deepest love. With his inability to get away from the personality of living authors, just as he could not think of Shakspeare or Richardson except through their characters, it is not surprising that there should be a very marked dualism of feeling in Hazlitt's criticism of his contemporaries. It is between his lines of censure for the author and of appreciation for the work that the reader of Hazlitt must look in determining what was his attitude toward his own age.

There were too many of his generation who knew Hazlitt as did Haydon, the painter, who calls him "That interesting man, that singular mixture of friend and fiend, radical and critic, metaphysician, poet, painter, on whose word no one could rely, on whose heart no one could calculate, and some of whose deductions he himself would try to explain in vain."<sup>1</sup> Such a remark shows considerable ignorance or prejudice, or both, but it is too representative not to be taken with some consideration. If he was judged too harshly, he must have been to some extent responsible for arousing the feeling from which such judgment comes.

Lamb had a deeper and more sympathetic insight into the hearts of his friends, and he knew Hazlitt more intimately than

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the Writings of William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt." Alex. Ireland. (London, 1868) p.44.

<sup>1</sup>See B. R. Haydon and his Friends," by Geo. Paston, London, 1905. p.54.



did most of his generation. He saw the real kernel of Hazlitt's nature beneath its ugly and prickly outer coat of fixed prejudice and a soured, sensitive disposition, coming in part no doubt from his peculiar experience and training, and in part from his disappointment in the failure of the revolution. "Protesting against much that he has written", said Lamb, "and some things which he chooses to do; judging him by his conversations which I enjoyed so long, and relished so deeply, or by his books, in their places where no clouding passion intervenes, - I should belie my own conscience, if I said less than that I think W. H. to be, in his natural and healthy state, one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing". If the latter part of this statement be true anywhere in Hazlitt's work, it is in the best of his literary criticism. It is there, if anywhere, that he is in his natural and healthy state, one of the finest spirits breathing; and it is there where he was more nearly right and his contemporaries who opposed him more nearly wrong than elsewhere; and it was not all his fault that they opposed him in his criticism. Thackeray expressed more than a half-truth when he said that Hazlitt "was of so different a caste to the people who gave authority in his day - the pompous big-wigs and schoolmen, who never could pardon him his familiarity of manner, so unlike their own - his popular - too popular - habits and sympathies, so much beneath their dignity", and that "In all his modes of life and thought he was so

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<sup>1</sup>List of the Writings of Wm. Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt. Alex. Ireland (London, 1868) p.29.





different from the established authorities, with their degrees and white neck cloths, that they hooted the man down with all the power of their lungs, and disdained to hear truth that came from such a rugged philosopher." <sup>1</sup>

It is with Lamb's Hazlitt and with Thackeray's Hazlitt that this chapter must deal for most part, - the Hazlitt who in spite of his infirmities of nature, his political prejudices and sensitive feelings of personal antipathy, - who in spite of himself, was yet able to see so much in Scott and Wordsworth and Coleridge and other of his contemporaries, and to say so many fine and true things about them. In fact it is here in dealing with the spirit of his own age that Hazlitt has come nearer than anywhere else to having introduced a new form of criticism into the world of letters. It was the form which Sainte-Beuve, perhaps the greatest of all nineteenth century critics, has looked to and emulated, though not surpassed, in his "Portraits Contemporains." It is of this form of Criticism that Sainte-Beuve is speaking when he exclaims, "There is another sort of criticism, more alert and more engaged in the tumult of the hour and in its living issues; in this the critic, armed like a light horseman, rides in the van of the battle and there directs the movements of the spirits of his age." <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See "William Hazlitt" by Alex. Ireland. (1889) p.lxi.

<sup>2</sup>"Hazlitt and Sainte-Beuve", by Edward Wright. - The Academy, 1906. 71:180-181.



What Hazlitt has to say of his contemporaries becomes all the more significant, too, not only because he is dealing with one of the most modern forms of criticism, but because it is here that his place in the romantic movement may most clearly be determined. Here, too, he may again be seen as a champion of the national genius in English literature in his opposition to the influx of German romanticism.

As a politician Hazlitt was a radical revolutionary, most extreme in his views, but in literature he stands much nearer the center than most of his contemporaries. In his estimations of Byron and Shelley, and, perhaps, for most part, of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Scott, he was not only writing a very modern form of criticism; but he was also, putting his political prejudices and personal antipathies aside, more representative of modern criticism, not even excepting Lamb, than any of his contemporaries. It will be the purpose of this chapter to determine in some degree his position in the romantic movement of the early nineteenth century as it is reflected in his opinions on his contemporaries, and <sup>to</sup> arrive at some estimate of the value of his deliverances as a critic upon the literature of his own age.

In setting out perhaps the first thing to do is to inquire what was Hazlitt's purpose in writing "The Spirit of the Age."<sup>1</sup> Was it to get revenge upon his enemies by putting them in a book? The work answers for itself in that respect, for .....

<sup>1</sup> The Spirit of the Age was first published anonymously in 1825 with the following title: The Spirit of the Age, or Contemporary Portraits\*. "To know another well were to know one's self." The motto is applicable. To know Hazlitt's criticism of his contemporaries well is to know Hazlitt. See Col. Wks. IV: 186.





he said about as many good things about the worst of them with the exception of Gifford<sup>1</sup> and one or two others, as he has said bad. It was because he was interested very vitally in his own age and in his contemporaries, and because his mind was teeming with ideas about them. He does not try to deal with the age itself, except as it is reflected in the individuals whom he considers as its representatives. That he meant the work to be something more than a treatment of the literary aspects of the time, however, is shown by his including such public characters as Lord Eldon and Mr. Wilberforce, and Mr. Bentham,<sup>2</sup> a philosopher and political economist of the time, and the Rev. Mr., Irving, a very popular preacher who was attracting much attention during the first quarter of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Most of the characters treated, however, were literary, the men whom Hazlitt knew most about, and with whom in most part he had been more or less intimately associated in one way or another at some time in his career. The difficulty in treating the work as a piece of literary criticism, in fact, arises not so much from his having included a number of non-literary characters, but because he .....

<sup>1</sup>Hazlitt acknowledges his criticism of Gifford as harsh. "But", he says, "as Mr. Gifford assumes a right to say what he pleases of others, they may be allowed to speak the truth of him." Col. Wks. IV: 310.

<sup>2</sup>See Dictionary of Nat'l. Biog. (N.Y.1908) II: 268.

<sup>3</sup>Edward Irving (1792-1834) was a very eminent and popular divine in his day. Born on the same day as Shelley, he was the tutor of Jane Welsh whom he later fell in love with, and<sup>he</sup> was an intimate friend of Carlyle's for a time. His mysticism led to "unknown tongues", and miraculous healing. See Dict. of Nat'l. Biography. N.Y. 1908, X: 489.





considers such men as Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, Scott, and others in so many ways that are not literary at all, and it is not always easy to sift the political and personal chaff from the literary grain. It has been already seen that Hazlitt was most interested in the personal and individual characters of the heroes and heroines of the dramas of Shakespeare and the novels of Richardson and Fielding, but here his interest is in living writers themselves. And it is in such difficult criticism - difficult because his subjects were living authors and not dead ones - that Hazlitt's deliverances upon his contemporaries, whether in the *Spirit of the Age*, or in his detached articles printed in the magazines of the time, can alone be found. If Leslie Stephens was right when he says, "The best, indeed, of Hazlitt's criticisms - if the word may be so far extended - are his criticisms of living men",<sup>1</sup> then an investigation, partial and incomplete as it must be in this instance, should at least be worth while if it can determine to some degree what are some of the peculiar excellences of these particular criticisms.

With only one exception in all the principal activities of the time in which he was really interested, Hazlitt occupied .....

<sup>1</sup> Leslie Stephen adds, "the criticism of contemporary portraits called the '*Spirit of the Age*' is one of the first of those series which have now become popular, as it is certainly one of the very best. The descriptions of Bentham, and Godwin, and Coleridge, and Horne Tooke, are masterpieces in their way." See Leslie Stephen's Article on William Hazlitt in the *Living Age*, (1875) 125: 259.



the true critic's position, one near the center. It was only in politics that he was really the victim of one idea, and it is all the more unfortunate that so much of what he has written presumably about other subjects should have been so badly warped by his political prejudices. He had been much influenced by Godwin's "Enquiry concerning Political Justice", but he very clearly sees the limitations of Godwin's thinking and writing, notwithstanding his partiality for him.<sup>1</sup> Bentham and his doctrine of like utilitarianism, Malthus's famous theory on the danger of over-population, he treats from a common-sense standpoint. "Mr. Bentham's forte is arrangement," said Hazlitt, "and the form of truth, though not its essence, varies with time and circumstances."<sup>2</sup> Time has more than proven Hazlitt's judgment here concerning Bentham's doctrines. Bentham was "for referring everything to utility," remarked Hazlitt, "There is a little narrowness in this; for if all the sources of satisfaction are taken away, what is to become of utility itself?"<sup>3</sup> In Godwin he saw "the first whole-length broadcaster of the doctrine of utility,"<sup>4</sup> however, and "The Spirit of the Age," he says, "was never more fully shown than in its treatment of this writer - its love of paradox and change, its dastard submission to prejudice and to the fashion of the day.

<sup>1</sup>Some attention should have been given to Godwin's influence upon Hazlitt's development as a critic in Chapter I of this dissertation.

<sup>2</sup>Col.Wks. IV: 191.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. IV: 200.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. IV: 396.





Five-and-twenty years ago he was in the very zenith of a sultry and unwholesome popularity - - - - now he is sunk below the horizon, and enjoys the serene twilight of a doubtful immortality<sup>1</sup>. Godwin had taken "abstract reason for rule of conduct, and abstract good for its end", Hazlitt observes, and Godwin's only crime, he thinks to have been that he was too ardent and active in trying to establish the "fallacy" of an old notion that "the just and True are one."<sup>2</sup> Hazlitt believed with Godwin that things were as they were through necessity, but he could not bring himself to say that "whatever is, is right."<sup>3</sup> In fact nothing could be much more abhorrent to Hazlitt than the whole scheme of utilitarian philosophy. What he thought of its promises to mankind is very well shown in the following words which he addresses to the school of utilitarianism, - "Your Elysium resembles Dante's Inferno - 'who enters there must leave all hope behind!'"<sup>4</sup>

The fact that Hazlitt has included both Jeffrey and Gifford among the characters representing the Spirit of the Age is significant, for much of the literary criticism of the time was in one way or another connected with a bitter struggle carried on between the Edinburgh Review and the Quarterly Review of which

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<sup>1</sup>Col. Wks. IV: 200.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. IV: 208.

<sup>3</sup>Hazlitt was somewhat like Shelley and Godwin in being a "necessarian" in belief. "It is the mist and obscurity," says Hazlitt, "through which we view objects that makes us fancy they might have been, or might still be otherwise. The precise knowledge of antecedents and consequents makes men poetical as well as philosophical Necessarians." Col. Wks. VI: 231.

<sup>4</sup>Col. Wks. VII: 194.



these two men were the editors. Naturally Hazlitt espoused the side of Jeffrey who edited the Edinburgh Review, as that magazine was Whig in politics, against the Tory Quarterly; and for Gifford he had not only the political enmity of feeling, but a strong personal antipathy. Gifford did not spare either Jeffrey or Hazlitt in his disgraceful tirades and cutting pieces of satire. The methods of the times in criticism were atrocious. The meanest personalities were not too low. The great pity was that the combatants had to drag the genuine literature of the time in the dirt and trample upon it. Had the conflict been fought fairly out along the issues in question it would not have mattered so much. Hazlitt himself was guilty of besmirching literature as it was seen in Coleridge, Wordsworth, and others, with the filth of the muck-raking and mud-throwing periodical warfare in which he was engaged. His criticism has suffered by it, too, both in form and substance. Perhaps the greatest excuse that can be offered for him, is that he was so constituted that he could not treat an author as a literary artist, alone and separate from whatever else he might have been, and he has suffered from this vice, as it were, of his greatest virtue. Nothing is more dangerous, perhaps, to the cause of literature than a dissociation of it from life, but Hazlitt came dangerously near at times, particularly in his criticism of his contemporaries, of submerging literature under the surface of life and letting the waves of political and personal feeling almost drown it.

Hazlitt calls Gifford a tool of the government, who has

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prostituted its powers for a place and a wage,<sup>1</sup> and as a critic, he says, Gifford belongs to a past age, "where the different editions of an author, or the dates of his several performances were all that occupied the inquiries of a profound scholar, and the spirit of the writer or the beauties of his style were left to shift for themselves, or exercise the fancy of the light and superficial reader. In studying an old author, he has no notion of anything beyond adjusting a point, proposing a different reading, or correcting, by the collation of various copies, an error of the press. In appreciating a modern one, if it is an enemy the first thing he thinks of is to charge him with bad grammar - he scans his sentences, instead of weighing his sense; of if it is a friend, the highest compliment he conceives it possible to pay him is, that his thoughts and expressions are moulded on some hackneyed model." What he says of Gifford here is of importance because it shows in large measure the very things Hazlitt tried to avoid and for which he had a strong antipathy in criticism.

Jeffrey, Hazlitt thought, was in advance of his age, but well fitted "both from knowledge and habits of mind to put a curb upon its rash and headlong spirit." "Mr. Jeffrey," he said, "is neither a bigot or an enthusiast."<sup>2</sup> Mr. Jeffrey seems to have been a genuine representative of his age, but if he was in advance of his time he must still yet be somewhat in advance of ours, for his renown has not grown since his own generation.  
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<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. IV: 299.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. IV: 314.





Whatever was little in Hazlitt came out in his periodical writings, but also much of what was best in him. Without some understanding of his connection with the periodicals it is hard to understand him as a critic - particularly his manner and method as a critical writer. Before turning to his deliverances on the really great literary productions of his own generation, it will be well to remember that they were all more or less colored with the dye of the periodical press, and were written too much after the mode and manner of journalism. It may be of some consolation to know that Hazlitt deplored at times the vicious methods then prevailing, and <sup>that</sup> he longed for a spirit of fairness again in political contentions, at least so far as the press is concerned. "We trust that this spirit is not yet extinguished among us; and that it will speedily assert itself, by trampling under foot that base system of mean and malignant defamation, by which our Periodical Press has recently been polluted and disgraced."<sup>1</sup> His own attitude toward things in general, and public affairs particularly, was of a too misanthropic nature to be quite fair. But it is lamentable that such men as Gifford and his colleagues of the press, should have kept him at such a white heat so much of his life; for while it may be true, as Henley thinks<sup>2</sup>, that some of his best pieces of

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. X: 229-230.

<sup>2</sup> "I cannot say that I regret the very scandalous attacks that were made on Hazlitt; since, if they had not been, we should have lacked some admirable pages in the Political Essays and the Spirit of the Age, nor should we now be privileged to rejoice in the dignified and splendid savagery of the Letter to William Gifford." See Henley's Introduction to Col. Wks. I: vii-viii.



writing came out of his battles, yet it is quite probable that his work as a literary critic would be much truer in judgment and freer from faults if he had never engaged in such a warfare, but had stood as Lamb stood, outside of the ring of combatants.

It may be of some aid in approaching Hazlitt's critical estimation of Coleridge to know what his attitude was toward the German influence which was so strong in England at that time and for which Coleridge was perhaps more responsible than any other one living man. This attitude is shown in his characterization of the early nineteenth century drama. There have been four schools of tragedy, he says, - first, the classical, going to nature for its source; second, the Gothic, or Romantic, such as is found in the work of the Elizabethans where the spirit is broader than in the classical; third, the "French or commonplace rhetorical style", which was didactic and unnatural; and fourth, the German or paradoxical style.<sup>1</sup> It is significant that he calls this last style prevailing in his own time "paradoxical", and that prevailing in the time of Shakespere "romantic". This use of terms may throw light upon his whole attitude toward his age when taken in connection with his views on German literature. He accuses the Germans of being more eager to win distinction for themselves in their writing than to do justice to the subject itself. "They write", he says, "not because they are full of a subject, but because they think it is a subject upon which, with

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<sup>1</sup>Col.Wks. V: 347.





due pains and labor something may be written.<sup>1</sup> - - - They are universal undertakers, and complete encyclopedists, in all moral and critical science. No question can come before them but they have a large apparatus of logical and metaphysical principles ready to play off upon it, and the less they know of the subject the more formidable is the use they make of their apparatus. The truth is, that they are naturally a slow, heavy people; and can only be put in motion by some violent and often repeated impulse, under the operation of which they lose all control over themselves - and nothing can stop them short of the last absurdity. Truth, in their view of it, is never what is, but what, according to their system, ought to be."

Hazlitt held that the German drama excelled in producing effect, "and it does this", he said, "by giving all the lengths not only of instinctive, but of speculative opinion, and startling the bearer by overturning all the established maxims of society, and setting at nought all the received rules of composition".<sup>2</sup> Werther he calls the best of Goethe's works, and he is glad to find that Coleridge and Lamb agree with him concerning Faust, "that it is a mere piece of abortive perverseness, or wilful evasion of the subject and omission of the characters, but it is written on the absurd principle that as to produce a popular and powerful effect is not a proof of the highest genius, so to produce no effect at all is an evidence of the highest poetry - and in fine,

that the German play is not to be named in a day with Marlowe's".<sup>3</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>Col.Wks. X: 78.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. V:360.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. VII: 313.



If Hazlitt were now living he might console himself on this unhappy bit of censure by reflecting that such men as Coleridge and Lamb had made the same mistake. But he realized the uncertainty with which he had to deal with the living poets. He said that he could not speak of them with the same reverence and the same confidence as he could of the dead poets. "I cannot be absolutely certain that any body, twenty years hence, will think anything about any of them," he observed, "but we may be pretty sure that Milton and Shakespere will be remembered twenty years hence."<sup>1</sup>

Hazlitt ascribed the origin of the Lake School of poets to the French Revolution,"or rather,"he says, "to those sentiments and opinions which produced that revolution, and which sentiments and opinions were directly imported into this country in translations from the German about that period."<sup>2</sup> Then it was, he adds, that poetry, under the impulse of the Revolution, rose from "servile imitation and tamest commonplace, to the utmost pitch of singularity and paradox." In this time of promise when everything was about to be renewed, Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth had undertaken the regeneration of letters. "The Germans, who made heroes of robbers, and honest women of cast-off mistresses," Hazlitt observes,"had already exhausted the extravagant and marvellous in sentiment and situation; our native writers adopted a wonderful simplicity of style and matter. + + + They took the same method in their new-fangled 'metre-ballad-mongering' scheme .....

<sup>1</sup>Col.Wks. V: 145.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. V:161.





which Rousseau did in his prose-paradoxes. + + + They were for bringing poetry back to its primitive simplicity and state of nature."<sup>1</sup>

Hazlitt is constantly shifting from the commendatory to the censorious mood in treating Coleridge and Wordsworth. Southey he does not praise so much, but holds in a rather fixed contempt as a government tool of no great genius at best. He thinks they lost their power when they turned from the right and took their places in the ranks of the legitimatists. "All the authority that they have as poets and men of genius must be thrown into the scale of Revolution and Reform," he says, "Their Jacobin principles indeed gave rise to their Jacobin poetry. Since they gave up the first, their poetical powers have flagged, and been comparatively or wholly in a state of suspended animation".<sup>2</sup>

Hazlitt's characterizations of Wordsworth and Coleridge are in his best manner. Rightly enough he puts Wordsworth at the head of his school. "Mr. Wordsworth's genius," he says, "is a pure emanation of the spirit of the Age. Had he lived in any other period of the world, he would never have been heard of." + + + + He takes the simplest elements of nature and of the human mind, the mere abstract conditions inseparable from our being, and tries to compound a new system of poetry from them; and has perhaps succeeded as well as any one could. + + + + His poetry is founded on setting up an apposition (and pushing it to the utmost

<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. V: 161-163.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. III: 206.





length) between the natural and the artificial; between the spirit of humanity, and the spirit of fashion and of the world. + + + + His Muse (it cannot be denied, and without this we cannot explain its character at all) is a levelling one. + + + It takes the commonest events and objects, as a test to prove that nature is always interesting, from its inherent truth and beauty, without any of the ornaments of dress or pomp or circumstances to set it off. Hence the unaccountable mixture of seeming simplicity and real abstruseness in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Fools have laughed at, wise men scarcely understand them."<sup>1</sup> This characterization would have to be given in full to do Hazlitt justice, but enough has been quoted to show how he has picked upon that which marks Wordsworth's poetry as something new, something original and distinct in itself, showing the nature of his genius, and its manner of working. What he has to say of Wordsworth's treatment of nature is strikingly modern, and it is here that he has rightly enough found the poet's deepest and truest originality. "To the author of the Lyrical Ballads, nature is a kind of home; and he may be said to take a personal interest in the universe," says Hazlitt. "There is no image so insignificant that it has not in some mood or other found the way into his heart; no sound that does not awaken the memory of other years.

'To him the meanest flower that blows can give

Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.'

The daisy looks up to him with sparkling eye as an old acquaint-  
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<sup>1</sup>Col.Wks. 270-271.



ance: the cuckoo haunts him with sounds of early youth not to be expressed: a linnet's nest startles him with boyish delight: an old withered thorn is weighed down with a heap of recollections: a grey cloak, seen on some wild moor, torn by the wind, or drenched in the rain, afterwards becomes an object of imagination to him: even the lichens on the rocks have a life and being in their thoughts. He has described all these objects in a way and with an intensity of feeling that no one else had done before him, and has given a new view or aspect of nature. He is in this sense the most original poet now living, and the one whose writings could the least be spared; for they have no substitute elsewhere."<sup>1</sup>

Hazlitt criticises Wordsworth as being entirely without, <sup>the machinery</sup> and apparatus belonging to poetry<sup>2</sup>, and he sees the evil effect of this neglect of form in the *Excursion* where "The line labors, the sentiment moves slow, but the poem stands stock-still".<sup>3</sup> He pronounces Wordsworth an egotist, but seems to believe that it belongs to his kind of genius to be one. "We might get rid of the cynic and egotist, and find in his stead a commonplace man", he says. "We should take the good the Gods provide us".

After what Hazlitt has said concerning the degeneracy observable in the poetry of the Lake School after it had turned

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<sup>1</sup>Col.Wks. IV: 273.

<sup>2</sup>"Mr. Wordsworth", says Hazlitt, "has given us the essence of poetry in his works, without the machinery, the apparatus of poetical diction, the theatrical pomp, the conventional ornaments; and we see what he has made of it." Ibid. VII: 196.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. V: 156.





from its revolutionary principles, it appears rather strange to find him praising Laodamia so highly. "It is a poem," he says, "that might be read aloud in Elysium, and the spirits of departed heroes and sages would gather round to listen to it."<sup>1</sup> It is, however, one of Wordsworth's later productions which Hazlitt calls "classical and courtly." The Excursion is not nearly so much to Hazlitt's taste. The effect of reading it, he avers, "was like being ushered into a stately hall and invited to set down to a splendid banquet in the company of clowns, and with nothing but successive courses of apple-dumplings served up."<sup>2</sup> He does not find Wordsworth's country characters true to life, but instead quite the opposite. Country people he has found, he says, to be suspicious, malicious, ignorant, and hating all they do not understand. Mr. Hazlitt did not understand them as did Wordsworth.

Notwithstanding the fun that Hazlitt makes of Wordsworth's country people and his disapproval of Wordsworth's lack of the machinery of poetry, no one can doubt the profound impression the poet had made upon him, and he understood, with some exception, both Wordsworth and his poetry. There is the clue given to the secret of Wordsworth's power in dealing with the commonplace, though perhaps not an adequate explanation of it, when he says, "Mr. Wordsworth's characteristic is one, and may be expressed in one word, - a power of raising the smallest things in nature into sublimity by the force of sentiment."<sup>3</sup> Hazlitt knew

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. IV: 274.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. IV: 275.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. V: 377.



Wordsworth's poetry so well in fact and found so much in it congenial to him, that whether he liked it or not, and generally he did not care to own it, - he was a Wordsworthian. As one of Hazlitt's admirers has said, "When ever Hazlitt was stirred to his depths, we may discern Wordsworth moving on the face of the waters."<sup>1</sup>

Hazlitt had a great contempt for Coleridge and also a great admiration. He despised the weakness of will that kept Coleridge from doing his own genius justice<sup>2</sup>, and he hated the inconsistency of his principles when he turned from the Jacobin cause. In Coleridge's conversation he read a greater power than he was able to find in any of his poetry. He thinks Coleridge might have written better if he had been less capable." "Our author's mind is (as he himself might express it)" says Hazlitt, "Tangential". There is no subject on which he has not touched, none on which he has rested."<sup>3</sup> In Coleridge he found, he declares the only person he ever knew who answered "to the ideal of a man of genius."<sup>4</sup> It was at a time when Coleridge's genius "had angel wings and fed on manna;" and "in his descriptions, you then saw" says Hazlitt, "the progress of human happiness and liberty in bright and never-ending succession, like the steps of Jacob's ladder, with airy shapes ascending and descending and with the voice of God at the top of the ladder."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See "William Hazlitt" by Augustin Birrell (London, 1902) p.55.

<sup>2</sup>"He belongs to all parties and is of service to none", says Hazlitt. + + + + We lose our patience when we think of the powers that he has wasted." Col. Wks. III: 142.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. IV: 213.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. V: 167.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. V:167.



After the spell was broken it was hard for Hazlitt to even do Coleridge bare justice. He prefers to think of what he might have been to what he really was. He thinks very little of Coleridge's criticisms<sup>1</sup>- entirely too little, and utterly despises him as a political writer.<sup>2</sup> He does not care for Coleridge's tragedies, believing that he had no "genuine dramatic talent." He sees one fine passage in *Christabel*, but reserved most of his praise for the *Ancient Mariner*, with a qualification attached. "His *Ancient Mariner*", says Hazlitt, "is his most remarkable performance, and the only one that I could point out to anyone as giving an adequate idea of his great natural powers. It is high German, however, and in it he seems to 'conceive of poetry but as a drunken dream, reckless, careless, and heedless, of past, present, and to come'".<sup>3</sup>

In Byron and Shelley, Hazlitt saw extremes. Byron <sup>o</sup>pan-dered too much to the spirit of the age, and in going "to the very edge of extreme and licentious speculation, + + + breaks his neck over it."<sup>4</sup> Shelley, Hazlitt avers, "was indeed the most striking example we remember of the two extremes described by Lord Bacon as the great impediments to human improvements, the love of novelty, and the love of Antiquity."<sup>5</sup> In Byron he sees a pampered, moody, and egotistical lord, who wrote himself in all his morbid charac-

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. X: 141.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. X: 121.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. V: 166.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. IV: 26.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. X: 258.





ters. But he admits that Byron had power. "He had a demon", said Hazlitt, "and that is the next thing to being full of the God."<sup>1</sup> Hazlitt failed to recollect "in all Lord Byron's writings, a single recurrence of a feeling or object that had ever excited an interest before; there is no display of natural affection, - no twining of the heart round an object: all is the restless and disjointed effect of first impressions, of novelty, contrast, surprise, grotesque costume, or sullen grandeur. + + + Mr. Wordsworth's poetical mistress is a Pamela; Lord Byron's an Eastern Princess, or a Moorish maid."<sup>2</sup> This is a recognition of Byron's orientalism as well as of some other qualities present-day critics have so much to say about.<sup>3</sup>

Hazlitt likes Shelley better as a man than he does Byron, though hardly as a poet. "With all his faults, Mr. Shelley, was an honest man", says Hazlitt, "His unbelief and his presumption were parts of a disease, which was not combined in him either with indifference to human happiness or contempt for human infirmities. There was neither selfishness nor malice at the bottom of his illusions!"<sup>4</sup> What he says of Shelley's poetry is like what he says of Byron very much in the vein of the prevailing strain of present-

<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. V: 153.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. XII: 328.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. X: 256-257.

<sup>4</sup> In commenting on the fourth canto of Childe Harold, Hazlitt says, that it was a falling off from the three former cantos, and left such an impression on his mind as a troubled dream does. He is tired of "the monotony of his Lordship's griefs", but thinks Byron was better fitted to describe human passion than nature. Col. Wks. XI: 420-424.



day criticism. "Mr. Shelley's style is to poetry," he observes, "what astrology is to natural science - a passionate dream, a straining after impossibilities, a record of fond conjectures, a confused embodying of vague abstractions, - a fever of the soul, thirsting and craving after what it cannot have, indulging it's love of power and novelty at the expense of truth and nature, associating ideas by contraries, and wasting great powers by their application to unattainable objects."<sup>1</sup>

In Byron, Hazlitt had seen pampered feelings and a perverted egotism, but not the effeminacy that he found in Keats. "I cannot help thinking," he observes, "That the fault of Mr. Keats's poems was a deficiency in masculine energy of style. He had beauty, tenderness, delicacy, in an uncommon degree, but there was a want of strength and substance."<sup>2</sup>

In Moore he found a gay, careless prodigality of poetic expression quite different from Campbell's timid, painstaking tediousness. He liked Moore for his politics, too, and as has been already observed it is hard for Hazlitt to separate the poet from the man in his judgements. He was not like Wordsworth, "a mouthing sycophant", nor like Southey, "a whining monk", nor yet like Coleridge, "a maudlin methodistical lay-preacher". Mr. Moore .....

<sup>1</sup>Col. Wks. X: 256.

<sup>2</sup>Hazlitt delivers himself in this wise on Shelley's "Triumph of Life". "Anything more filmy, enigmatical, discontinuous, unsubstantial than this, we have not seen; nor yet more full of morbid genius and vivifying soul." He calls "The Witch of Atlas", and "Alastor" both "a sort of neutral voyage through the unexplored regions of space and time." Ibid. X: 265-6.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. VI: 254.





unites in himself" said Hazlitt, "two names that were sacred, till they were prostituted by our modern mountebanks, the Poet and the Patriot."<sup>1</sup> The genius of both Moore and Campbell, Hazlitt calls national. The faults of Moore he sees in his levity, too great facility, and lack of "intensity, strength, and grandeur." He was rapid and fanciful without "momentum and passion".<sup>2</sup> Moore had pandered too much to the "artificial taste of the age", to suit Hazlitt, "and in consequence he finds his productions "somewhat meretricious and effeminate." What he says here in connection with Moore's pandering to the spirit of the age is a criticism of the age itself. "It was thought formerly enough", says Hazlitt, "to have an occasionally fine passage in the progress of a story or a poem, and an occasionally striking image or expression in a fine passage or description. + + + + Now all must be raised to the same tantalizing and preposterous level. There must be no pause, no interval, no repose, no gradation."<sup>3</sup> It is this fault of the age that he sees in Moore, that makes what he has to say of him of so much importance. His criticism of Campbell, with the exception of his remarks on the Battle of Hohenlinden, is hardly worthy of attention here. "Of all modern compositions the most lyrical in spirit and sound";<sup>4</sup> is what he exclaims in admiration of Campbells' famous battle-piece. This is not so far from the truth, but it shows a certain characteristic precipitancy in Hazlitt's manner of expression. He jumps too unadvisedly from the positive to the superlative when struck with <sup>the</sup> excellence of a single piece. What he says of Crabbe's poetry is more to his credit as a critic. He accounts for Crabbe's pop-

<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. III: 313-312    <sup>2</sup> Ibid. V: 151.    <sup>3</sup> Ibid. IV: 354.    <sup>4</sup> Ibid IV: 347.



ularity "on no other principle than the strong ties that bind us to the world about us, and our involuntary yearnings after whatever in any manner powerfully and directly reminds us of it."<sup>1</sup>

There is a marked dualism of both feeling and judgement in Hazlitt's criticism of his contemporaries. He both condemns and commends, often in the same breath, and there is little of the unreserved praise and whole-souled appreciation, such as was found in his deliverance on Shakespere and the Elizabethans, and Richardson and the eighteenth century novelists. In the Lake Poets he condemned the backsliders at the same time that he was praising them as poets and men of genius. In Byron and Shelley he saw great power and capability, but found them too extreme to be wholly countenanced. And in Scott this dualism of feeling is just as pronounced, but here it is somewhat different. He finds that Scott possessed admirable good sense and was not at all extreme, and he cannot accuse Scott of having changed his opinions and faith as he does Wordsworth and Coleridge and Southey. But for all that he cannot swallow Scott's Toryism, - not with all his admiration for Scott's genius. "Who is there that admires the author of Waverly more than I do? Who is there that despises Sir Walter Scott more? I do not like to think there should be a second instance of the same person's being."

'The wisest, meanest of mankind - '  
and should be heartily glad if the greatest genius of the age

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<sup>1</sup>Col.Wks. IV: 348.



shall turn out to be an honest man".<sup>1</sup> Hazlitt's inability to understand the motives of anyone who differed from him on political questions so squarely as did Scott caused him to wonder if the great novelist was not a kind of cold-blooded hypocrite in his writings."<sup>2</sup>

The principal excellences Hazlitt discovers in Scott are his lack of egotism, great dramatic power, freedom from prejudice in depicting different classes of people, his vivacity of manner, clearness of style, life of mind, and the remarkable fecundity of his intellect. Scott, says Hazlitt, "gives us man as he is. + + + + Lord Byron makes man after his own image, woman after his own heart."<sup>3</sup> Scott by emancipating man from his petty prejudices became "one of the greatest teachers of morality that ever lived", and Lord Byron was one of the greatest pamperers of those prejudices. Scott was the greatest dramatic writer of the time, Hazlitt avers, and Byron the least so.<sup>4</sup> Hazlitt imagined that Scott was true to reality and historical fact; and Scott was nearer to being this than anyone else at a time when Mrs. Radcliffe's novels and Monk Lewis's and Walpole's works were fresh in the minds of the people. "This is the beauty of Sir Walter Scott," says Hazlitt, "he takes a legend or an actual character as he finds it, while other writers think they have not performed their engagements and acquitted themselves with applause, till they have

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. VII: 99.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. XI: 538.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. IV: 255.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. IV: 256.





slobbered over the plain face of nature with paint and varnish of their own. If we were to describe the secret of this author's success in three words, we would say, that it consists in the absence of egotism."<sup>1</sup>

Hazlitt believed that a writer or painter turns off work according to his power as an artist, and he did not believe that men of genius could work only when the fit was on them. Scott he cites as an instance of a writer, "the fecundity of whose pen is no less admirable than its felicity."<sup>2</sup>

Hazlitt held that Scott was deservedly the most popular poet of the time because he described "that which is most easily and generally understood with more vivacity and effect than any body else", without any of Wordsworth's idiosyncrasies, and differing "from his readers only in a greater range of knowledge and facility of expression."<sup>3</sup> But Hazlitt, for all that may be argued on the side of his popularity, does not care much for his poetry. He had hit the town between the romantic and the fashionable, and between the two, secured all classes of readers on his side", Hazlitt remarks, "but", he adds, "I conceive that he is to the great poet, what an excellent mimic is to a great actor. There is no determinate impression left on the mind by reading his poetry. It has no results. + + + The notes to his poems are just as entertaining as the poems themselves, and his poems are only entertaining."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. X: 392.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. VII: 158.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. V: 154.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. V: 155.



Scott's poetry, Hazlitt thought was not comparable to his prose, and in his characteristic way, the critic goes to the characters of Scott's poems and novels for illustration. "For which of his poetical heroines would the reader break a lance so soon as for Jeanie Deans? What Lady of the Lake can compare with Rebecca?" he exclaims. "His poetry was a lady's dressing maid dressed out in cast-off finery: his prose is a beautiful, rustic nymph, that, like Dorothea in Don Quixote, when she is surprised with dishevelled tresses bathing her feet in the brook, looks round her abashed at the admiration her charms have excited<sup>1</sup>."

A great admirer of Godwin's Caleb Williams<sup>2</sup> and of the works of Mrs. Radcliffe, Miss Barney, and Mrs. Inchcape as was Hazlitt, he still saw a greater excellence in Scott. He was willing to allow to the women writers "a quicker perception of any oddity or irregularity of character" and a mind "more alive to every absurdity that arises from a violation of the rules of society, or a deviation from established custom,"<sup>3</sup> and he observed a deep "internal conception and contemplation of the possible workings of the human mind." in Godwin that he did not find in Scott; but it was in the latter that he believed he had found a better kind of romance.

"Sir Walter has found out (oh, rare discovery) that facts are better than fiction; that there is no romance like the romance of real life", he exclaims. Sir Walter had taken "his

<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. IV: 243-245.

<sup>2</sup> Hazlitt called Caleb Williams the very best novel of the modern school. Col. Wks. VIII: 342.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid: VIII: 124.





materials from the original, authentic sources, in large concrete masses, and 'nothing was wanting - the illusion was complete'<sup>1</sup>. Hazlitt found no trouble in distinguishing between the work of the author of Caleb Williams and the author of Waverly before the identity of the latter was known, because in Waverly he found that the writer owed "almost every thing to external observation and traditional character". It is doing Hazlitt justice to say that Scott's novels with all their glamour and tinsel of an idealized and romantic chivalry that never existed, certainly were much nearer to history and to reality in their spirit and their manner of treatment than any works of a similar<sup>^</sup> nature before them, and Hazlitt has done well to remark upon their sense of reality and historical versimilitude. Still it is well that he put it as he did when he said "nothing is wanting - the illusion is complete". For the illusion cannot of course be overlooked in any sane and modern criticism of Scott's novels.

It would be interesting to compare what Hazlitt had said of Cooper with what he has said of Scott. Cooper, he says, also had the "saving grace of originality" but he takes the American writer to task for insisting on minute details and failing to put motion into his works. The story stops and stands still while the writer is explaining accompaniments of an incident, not seeming to be aware that an abridgement of matter was all that the mind required. This is a good criticism. It would perhaps be more to the purpose to see what he has to say of Irving, however, .....

<sup>1</sup> Col. Wks. IV: 246-247.



for he has compared him to a slight degree with Lamb, and Lamb cannot be overlooked entirely in a chapter devoted to Hazlitt and his contemporaries.

Mr. Sidney T. Irwin in his article on Hazlitt and Lamb, says, "Whatever they thought of one another, the history of criticism has no choice but to link them. That felicitious mixture of sanity and enthusiasm which enabled them to be pioneers of the new century, and to hand on the torch of the old, at one and the same time, gives them a place by themselves."<sup>1</sup> There is considerable truth in this, for Lamb and Hazlitt did stand apart from the critical writers of their time. With Coleridge they did more than any other writers of their time to give a genuinely critical judgement and appreciations of what they dealt with as critics. But Coleridge, Scott, and Carlyle, were so much more than mere critics, and were critics in such a different sense, that they can hardly be put in the same category with Hazlitt and Lamb, who were both essayists, and were both interested, in large measure, in similar subjects. A strong feeling of friendship had existed between them, and a common taste for much of what was best in Elizabethan literature and in the works of Pope, Fielding, and Richardson, gave them a fellow-feeling, and set them apart from Coleridge and Wordsworth who did not care at all for Pope.<sup>2</sup>

In Lamb's work as a writer Hazlitt sees a love of the

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<sup>1</sup>See The London Quarterly, 1906, 204: 162.

<sup>2</sup>See London Quar. Rev. 204: 182 (Irwin's Article on Hazlitt and Lamb).



remote, of the past with its memories, and a shyness of all that is impressive or ambitious in appearance. "He evades the present, he mocks the future, Hazlitt says. "He disdains all the vulgar artifices of authorship, all the cant of criticism, and helps to notoriety."<sup>1</sup> In Lamb's taste for books, Hazlitt finds a certain idiosyncrasy. Not caring for the Scotch novels, Lamb was fond of Fielding and Smollet, and he was deeply read in such authors as Barton, Browne, Fuller, and Bunyan - writers not quite of the most popular type during the early nineteenth century. Yet what could be more in keeping with Lamb's genius, for as Hazlitt says, "Mr. Lamb has succeeded not by confirming to the Spirit of the Age, but in opposition to it. He does not march boldly along with the crowd, but steals off the pavement to pick his way in the contrary direction. He prefers bye-ways to highways."<sup>2</sup> Hazlitt did not conform to his age or its spirit, but his non-conformance was not quite of the inoffensive kind that Lamb's was. He rather preferred elbowing his way defiantly through the crowd in the open highway than<sup>n</sup> to "stand on one side to look over an old book-stall, or stroll down some deserted pathway in search of a pensive inscription over a tottering doorway", with Mr. Lamb.

Hazlitt has put Elia and Geoffrey Crayon together in the Spirit of the Age, but he does not find very much similarity

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<sup>1</sup>Col. Wks. IV: 364.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. IV: 362-362.





between them. Irving he observes had "skimmed the cream" from the some of the best and most popular English writers, quite the opposite to Lamb's fondness for dealing with the obscure and little known in literature. Rightly enough he finds much more in Lamb than he does in Irving, but he is not backward in acknowledging merit to the latter, though he wisely gives Irving a hint that he might do better to stick a little more closely to his own side of the Atlantic both in his manner of writing and in his choice of subjects. In Irving, Hazlitt seems to find an excellence of humor and a lightness of heart more agreeable to his critical taste than Lamb's attempts at lightness. He allows, however, that Lamb could make the best pun and the best remark in the course of a Thursday evening's party; but he adds, "His serious conversation, like his serious writing, is his best."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the essential difference to be found in Hazlitt's and Lamb's criticism may be best explained in what Hazlitt has to say in the way of censure in commenting on Lamb's enthusiastic nature. "His worst fault", observes Hazlitt, "is an over-eagerness of enthusiasm, which occasionally makes him take a surfeit of his highest favourites!"<sup>2</sup> Hazlitt fortunately is not quite free from this most pardonable of faults, but, as has been observed in his difference of opinion with Lamb concerning the last scene in Ford's Broken Heart, he is less inclined to be carried away

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 1 Col. Wks. VII: 36.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. IV: 365-366.



from the center in his criticism of individual pieces and authors than is Lamb. But if he is more reliable as a critic than Lamb, he lacks the latter's originality of conception and his sympathetic insight into the soul of everything with which he came into contact. Lamb loved man better as an individual; Hazlitt loved man better in the generic sense, and as he found the human character embodied in books.<sup>1</sup> Lamb is greater as an original writer in that he was nearer to the real individual in life, but Hazlitt is the better critic in that he is more interested in humanity as it is exhibited in the characters of literature, and because he cares more for ideas and ideals than did Lamb, who, with the temper of a poet, stuck more closely to the concrete world.

The purpose of this chapter, as has been stated, was to determine the nature and qualities of Hazlitt's criticism of the literature of his own age, and to come to a clearer understanding of his position in the Romantic Movement, as that position may be seen in his attitude toward his contemporaries. Hazlitt's criticism of his own age is of particular significance inasmuch as it marks a new departure in literary criticism - introducing in *The Spirit of the Age* a form of criticism which has since been employed by Sainte-Beuve and many present-day critics. Hazlitt's deliverances on his contemporaries is marked by a dualism in both feeling and judgment which arose in large part from his political prejudices and journalistic relations. He occupied a central position.

<sup>1</sup> See Sidney T. Irwin's article on Hazlitt and Lamb in *London Quarterly Review*, 204: 162.





tion in respect to most of the intellectual activities of his time, with the exception of political and personal issues. This may be seen in his attitude toward Godwin and Bentham on the side of philosophy and political economy, and Shelley and Byron on the side of literature. In *The Spirit of the Age* he was interested in individual writers in much the same that he had been interested in the characters in Shakespeare. He was opposed to the tendencies of German romanticism and disapproved of the hold it had taken on the literary mind in England. The Lake Poets were renegades and turn-coats in his eyes, but he did justice to their genius. In Coleridge he saw the greatest possibilities and a promise never fulfilled, but he admitted the excellence of his best occasional work and the genius of his conversation. In Wordsworth he saw a great originality of genius, which he characterized as a "leveling" genius that rendered the commonplace sublime by showing its inherent truth as it was related to the universe. In Byron he found great power, but he was repulsed by the morbid egotism of his poetry. Shelley he characterized as a seeker after novelty and a lover of antiquity, who was pursuing an impossible dream. In the *Lyrical Ballads* of Coleridge and Wordsworth he saw a reaction of the German paradoxical style upon itself, which had at last turned to the simple and the common in order to be different and unusual. In Byron and Shelley he saw the extremes of the strange, the oriental, and the startling elements of romanticism. Scott, he called the "most dramatic writer" of his age and the least egotistic. But he had no patience with Scott's Tory affiliations, notwithstanding his admiration for Scott as a writer. For Scott's

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poetry he did not care much, finding it entertaining, but little more than entertaining. In Scott's novels, however, he discovered a wonderful genius which was seeking the true romance of reality by going to history and nature for concrete material with which to make its "illusion complete". This recognition on the part of Hazlitt, coming when it did, was of importance, since much of what was visionary and chimerical in early nineteenth century poetry has been corrected and off-set by the romantic realism of the nineteenth century novel.

Lamb's and Hazlitt's names are linked together in the history of criticism. They agreed in general on the main body of English literature, and, in a certain sense, both were non-conformists to the spirit of their age. Hazlitt, as more the critic and partisan, came more sharply in conflict with it. As a critic of his contemporaries, however, - dealing ~~was~~ much with the characters and personalities of his authors as with their writings, Hazlitt must be looked upon as a romanticist of the romanticists. Much like Byron in natural temper, he did not seek to carry the reaction of romanticism upon itself, as Byron had done, from the remote and unusual to the strange and terrible. But just as Wordsworth had turned to the simple style and the common-place subject in his poetry, Hazlitt, in the same paradoxical manner, had turned to common-sense and sanity in criticism. <sup>Like</sup> Wordsworth's tendencies toward a classical simplicity and moderation in poetry, Hazlitt's inclinations toward common-sense and moderation in criticism were given a deep and romantically beautiful connotation in his manner of deliverance<sup>1</sup>; and perhaps his work may, though in a less popular

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<sup>1</sup>"The Spirit of the Age was, in many respects, the best of Hazlitt's productions. It was the 'Harvest Home' of his mind. He collected





form and belonging to a different field, mark an advance into the realms of 'the true romance' just as Wordsworth's poetry has done. Wordsworth observed and employed a rich and genuine source of literary material in the life of the common people, and Hazlitt realized strongly that the final test of all literature is to be found in the suffrage of the people who themselves live the life which all true literature must in some form or other reflect.

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into it the gathered essence of his critical thought. It contained his mature and deliberate opinion of many of his contemporaries expressed in language 'gorgeous as the sun at midsummer.'" Gillfillan in "First Gallery of Literary Portraits", Edinburgh, 1851. p.51.





## VI.

### CONCLUSION.

The principal results of this investigation may be briefly summarized, by chapters, as follows:-

1. Early in life Hazlitt gave evidence of an exceedingly keen sensibility and a vivid imagination. As a painter he found his favorite masters in such artists as Raphael, Titian, and Rubens. The human figure and character as they are found in art and literature interested him most from the first, and he had an innate feeling of dislike for anything he found in books or pictures that savored of the insipid and artificial. Before he was initiated into the higher realms of poetry by Coleridge and Wordsworth in 1798, he had long been familiar with such writers as Richardson, Fielding, Cervantes, and Rousseau, who were destined to exert a strong influence upon him toward a sentimental realism on the one hand and common-sense on the other.

2. Hazlitt's debt to Rousseau was large. Possessed of similar natural tempers, both were radicals and non-conformists. Hazlitt had drunk deeply from Rousseau's springs of romanticism in the Confessions and the Nouvelle Heloise, and was also a true son of Rousseau, the father of the Revolution, in his inheritance of the revolutionary idea and <sup>in</sup> his hatred of legitimacy. Hazlitt's recognition, as a critic, of the need of preserving and cherishing national genius in literature, and of submitting, as the final test, all literature to the suffrage of the people and the ages, shows forces at work that had been put in motion

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by Rousseau and the Revolution.

3. The literature of the Elizabethan Age appealed strongly to Hazlitt because it was national in spirit, dramatic in genius, and possessed a "high romantic tone". Hazlitt's criticism of this period is marked by his purest utterances, unmarred by personal antipathy or political prejudice, combined with a rare gusto of feeling calculated to impress upon his readers the same experience of delight with which he had himself <sup>been</sup> possessed when reading the writers whom he was treating. Lavish in his praise of the best he found in the age, he nevertheless remained too near the center to approve of the extravagance and unnaturalness that he saw in the drama that succeeded Shakespere. His criticism of this period is found at its best in his dealing with the characters of the drama rather than with the drama itself.

4. Hazlitt's criticism of the eighteenth century is characterized by a fine discrimination in sifting the true work of its genius from the false, and by a broad spirit of appreciation for everything that was truly excellent after its kind. In his characterization of Pope he showed an inimitable power for treating a single author and fastening upon the peculiar and original genius of that author. In Thomson and the best work of the romantic poets he saw something approaching much nearer to nature than anything he had found in the poetry of the Queen Anne school, but he denounced much that he saw in Young, Shenstone, and others of the Romantic School, as meretricious and calculated to produce an effect rather than to say anything about the subjects they were treating. Richardson, Fielding, and the novelists appealed to  
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him most, for here he believed he had found a truer expression of the national English genius than anywhere else in the eighteenth century. It is to his credit also that he recognized so fully as he did at this time, the importance of the novel and its possibilities as a form of literature.

5. In treating his own age, Hazlitt helped to introduce a new and modern form of literary criticism into existence. In his criticism of his contemporaries, he is too often carried away by his political prejudices and personal feelings, and his work has suffered from being too journalistic in form, but it shows a remarkable insight into the genius of the time. It is here that he has treated individual authors in much the same way that he had treated the characters in Shakespere. He was often unfair and extreme in his attitude toward an author, but in the end he seldom or never failed to do his work justice, provided it really possessed the merit of genius. Much of his best and most solid criticism is to be found in *The Spirit of the Age*, and it was there, where standing as he did much nearer the center than any other critic, perhaps, of the time, he showed himself most capable of reacting against the extravagances and at the same time of appreciating the excellences of romantic literature. Disregarding the inherent defects of journalism, it is the criticism which, in form at least, is the most modern of Hazlitt's work, and in some ways the best adapted, particularly when projected against the background of what he had already said concerning English literature in its earlier periods, to prove most profitable to a generation which seems to be seeking not only a correct-

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ive for the extravagances of a decadent form of romanticism,  
but also a critical standard that would combine the tried virtue  
of the ancient classic with the virility and power to be found  
in the best of modern literature.

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<sup>1</sup>I have read or gone through every separate piece in Waller and Glover's edition of Hazlitt and all of the Napoleon except the last two volumes. All books and articles that I have not read or consulted will be indicated in this list by a star.





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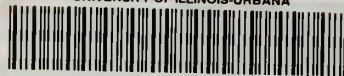








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